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Thesis

THE TREND OF MODERN DRAMA AS SHOWN IN THE WORKS OF EUGENE O'NEILL

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THE TREND OF MODERN DRAMA AS SHOWN IN THE WORKS OF EUGENE O'NEILL

Introduction

*"...We are living in the midst of a very wonderful creativity, a period more vast and varied, more widespread and more versatile in its productiveness, than even those other great periods -- the Greek, the Spanish, the Elizabethan and the classic French."

To study the drama of today is tremendously worth while, not only to the scholar but to the sociologist and the philosopher. Sixteen years ago, Archibald Henderson summed up the tendencies of the changing drama in a sentence that seems to have increased in significance as each new theatrical season produced its crop of plays.

**"The drama of today, through the influences of modern science, of contemporary democracy, of shifting moral values, of the critical rather than the worshipful attitude toward life, of an irresistible thrust toward increased naturalism and greater veracity, has become bourgeois, dealing with the world of every day; comic, verging upon the tearful, or serious, trenching upon the tragic; unheroic, suburban, and almost prosaic, yet intensely

* 5 p. 5
**4 p.359

"interesting by reason of its sincerity and its humanity, essentially critical in tone, proving all things, holding fast that which is good."

Intensive work in modern drama, then, gives to the student an opportunity to consider present-day life; its interests, its fears, its ideals. What the novel did for the Victorians, drama does for us. It allows us to participate imaginatively in crises of human life which are barred to us in reality. Though the plays of our time are not accessible as spectacles for all, they are available in printed form. And as one reads more and more plays, the pattern of our modern life emerges with increasing distinctness from the* "anecdotes" that the playwrights offer as illustration.

**"The true dramatic technician mirrors the soul of the age by presenting all of its complexities in ordered form. Bending upon the social world a discerning eye, he not only creates dramatic correspondences; he also draws together all the lines, focalizes the strains of force and tendency, converges currents that to the careless eye are vagrant and disconnected. He makes of his world of correspondences a true and yet an ordered thing, stamped with the evidences of nature's complexity, yet complete in itself, presenting some of life's mystery, yet so clear that he who runs may read. The implicit laws of social solidarity he makes explicit upon the stage. In his way he is a distinct and valuable type of social servant, for he isolates the vague social ethics governing the time and in making it dramatic makes it dynamic."

* Shaw's designation
** 3 pp.78,79

Considering the extent and importance of his field, the student of modern drama may well pause for consideration before making his advance. The consideration results in one immediate conclusion. "This is too much for me to cover! I must select a limited area for my operations, else I shall never get anywhere."

Two restrictions suggest themselves as sensible. First, the study of drama from a definite viewpoint, with the aim of ascertaining the answer to a definite question. Second, the limitation of the study to the works of a single author.

The writer will endeavor in this thesis to envisage the drama of today in an effort to discover its trend. Trend implies movement. Movement may be purposive or aimless, but it covers ground. The scholar, surveying the "movement" of anything, notes two things: the direction, and the manner of progress. To express the figure in more detail, one may say that the "direction" of modern drama involves a study of the content, of the ground covered. The "manner of progress" is a matter of method, of the treatment of the subject, of form and technique.

Such a division involves obvious difficulties. The ground covered often determines the method of getting over it. Nevertheless, even so fallible a division conduces to greater clarity of exposition than no division at all.

The dramatist whose works are chosen as representative of the trend of modern drama must obviously fulfil certain qualifications. He must have written a number of plays that have been more or less widely performed. These plays must have been conceded to be of worth by a widely-varied group of critics, professional and amateur.

Eugene Gladstone O'Neill has three times* received the Pulitzer prize of $1000 for having written "the original American play performed in New York which best represents the educational value and power of the stage in raising the standard of good morals, good taste and good manners." His official biographer,** Barrett H. Clark, says of him: "Since the production of 'Beyond the Horizon' in 1920 his position as our leading dramatist has not been seriously challenged..."

It would be easy to multiply examples of Clark's statement. For that very reason we are giving but two quotations in support of it.*** The first is from a little book published in Seattle in 1928. It is included because the book is obviously intended as a serious and reasoned attack upon O'Neill.
**** "Unquestionably the first great American playwright, Eugene O'Neill is no unique, indigenous growth."

The second quotation adduced as evidence of O'Neill's position is from the American Mercury of last August. Prejudiced as Nathan may be, opinionated and caustic, he is yet more generally known than any other American dramatic critic. For this reason his opinion, though it is no more than opinion, carries weight. The quotation is given in full, since to take out only the relevant sentences produces somewhat the impression of the "blurb" on the jacket of a new book, where statements are so carefully edited that the reader has no matter for forming his own opinion,--except in accordance with the intention of the publishers.

* 6 p.55
** ibid, p.1,23
*** But see appendix i
**** 2, p.8

*"Let this chapter be devoted to a consideration of American Dramatists and to an effort to ascertain what place, if any, they presently occupy in the theatrical sun.

"That O'Neill is the outstanding figure in the catalogue under discussion is now denied only by such critics as employ the denial, against their honest and better judgment, to lend to their writings that share of fillip which always attaches to marching out of step. Their insincerity is easily penetrable, for while they eloquently argue that O'Neill is not the outstanding force, they do not tell us who is. With the production this last season of 'Dynamo', a very poor piece of work, the hostility toward its author and the skepticism over his hitherto loudly proclaimed talents took on full sail, and we were entertained by an overnight shifting of the critical course. Because he had written a bad play, O'Neill, his antecedent work forgotten, was denounced as an overestimated and even ridiculous dramatist, and it was argued that, since this one play was so bad, doubtless his previous good plays were not really so good as they had previously been thought to be. In this we engaged no novelty, for the tactic is a commonplace one in American criticism, whether literary or dramatic, and familiar to every one who follows the critical art as it is manoevred in God's country.

"If O'Neill is not the leader among American dramatists, 'Dynamo' or no 'Dynamo', it is pretty difficult to make out who the leader is. While it is perfectly true that in one or two of his other plays as well as in 'Dynamo' he has exposed

*1 M, p.500

"at times a juvenile indignation, a specious profundity and a method of exaggeration that has verged perilously on travesty, he has nevertheless written a number of plays of a very definite quality, a number of plays that outdistance any others thus far written by Americans and, whether in his better work or poorer, shown an attitude and an integrity -- to say nothing of a body of technical resource, -- far beyond those of any of his American rivals. The truth about O'Neill is that he is the only American playwright who has what may be called 'size'. There is something relatively distinguished about even his failures; they sink not trivially but with a certain air of majesty, like a great ship, its flags flying, full of holes. He has no cheapness, even in his worst plays. 'The First Man', 'Welded' and 'Dynamo', for example, are mediocre affairs as far as drama goes, but in them just the same there is that peculiar thing that marks off even the dismal efforts of a first-rate man from those of a second-rate.

II

"With O'Neill in a category apart, we come to the others."

In the following pages, this thesis will consider the trend of modern drama as shown in O'Neill's plays by discussing under "content" the subjects treated, the type of characters involved, and the settings which O'Neill utilizes. In the second part, it will deal with a general consideration of O'Neill's treatment of his themes and characters, and will then discuss details of form and handling, especially O'Neill's use of the conventional technique of playwriting, his use of stage direc-

tions, his special method of attacking social and historical problems, his use of symbolism, and his innovations in handling soliloquy. Finally, it will consider briefly the diction of the plays.

PART I.

The Content of O'Neill's Plays.

Themes or Subjects.

Analysis of the plays of O'Neill reveals that four topics preoccupy the dramatist. Following Ibsen and Shaw, he deals with the problem of marriage, although, unlike these two, he finds his theme rather in the essential nature of marriage than in the Victorian or modern aspects of that institution.

Modern society, its implications, its weaknesses and strength, is the great topic of all modern dramatists. O'Neill has a number of plays on this subject. Like Shaw, he reveals his philosophy of life in his treatment of sociological themes, although they are not all quite so frankly propaganda for that philosophy as are those of Shaw.

Character study is O'Neill's chief interest, if we are to judge of emphasis by quantity. In almost all of O'Neill's plays* "the pendulum swing from Aristotle has reached its full; the action is incidental, of value only as it reveals the man."

In eight of the plays character analysis supplies the entire interest. These are "The Dreamy Kid"; "Beyond the Horizon"; "Diff'rent"; "Gold"; "Anna Christie"; "The Straw"; "Desire Under the Elms"; and "Strange Interlude". If the above

*2, p. 11

statement seems too strong, let the reader ask himself this question: What do I want to know in any of these plays? Is it what happened next? or what will the characters do about this situation? Moreover, in the plays which deal ostensibly with other themes, the character study is frequently an equal claimant for our attention. An excellent example of this double theme is "The Emperor Jones". Although one may classify this as a study of social conditions, one cannot deny that the method of this study is a merciless and unrelieved character analysis.

O'Neill's fourth topic, and his present absorbing interest, is religion. Three plays deal primarily with this topic: "The Fountain", "Lazarus Laughed", and the last play, "Dynamo".

Underlying all the plays is O'Neill's own philosophy of life, finding concrete expression in the three plays mentioned above, but of equal importance in determining the content of almost all the plays.

Religion

Nearly fifty years have passed since the mushroom growth of science and the study of comparative religions caused a widespread scepticism concerning the validity of Christian dogma. We have now an enormous body of literature setting forth, directly or indirectly, philosophies of life offered as substitutes or variants for the philosophy of Christianity. Beginning with Schopenhauer, philosophy has become the concern of the many instead of the few, of the writer of literature as well as of "pure" philosophy. Nietzsche, a favorite author of O'Neill,* followed Schopenhauer as a popularizer of philosophic theory with his gospel of the superman enunciated by Zarathustra. In our own country, William James gave us a concept of God that helped to establish a religion that would work,-- the concept of a finite God. Today, G. K. Chesterton is offering us a fighting religion, based on a theory of duality. Life is glorious struggle for the believer in God, Chesterton says, for equal with God is Satan. The humanists, while expressly eliminating from their philosophy any metaphysics at all, nevertheless are increasingly influential today because they offer a Rule for living,-- self-control, self-discipline, the harmonizing of man's desires as an efficient means for attaining the goal of

* 6, p.18

those desires,-- happiness.

Two well-known writers who frankly use fiction for propaganda of their personal religions are H. G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw. Bertrand Russell's essays are widely read. One need only mention the huge body of Freudian literature. The public has even begun to take an interest in comparative philosophies, as is shown by the rating of Will Durant's Story of Philosophy as a best-seller.

One expects O'Neill to swim the current of this philosophic renascense, and he does. Indeed, as a true dramatist, he would probably force the interest did it not exist.

*"True art...is one of the most potent instrumentalities ...for the inculcation of moral principles. ... The dramatist ... carefully chooses from the welter and chaos of actual and imagined incidents those particular incidents which establish a chain of intellectual, social, or moral causation. ... The modern social dramatist...becomes an interpreter of life."

What is O'Neill's interpretation? The critics disagree. One says:

**"Not only, like most moderns, does he see man as a subordinate part of nature, the sport of incomprehensible and meaningless natural forces within and without himself, a passive and helpless victim who can only suffer and vainly struggle in the grip of powers which he can not understand, let alone cope with; not only, that is, is O'Neill a naturalist and a determinist: he is also a pessimist who sees everything as predetermined for the worst... He shows us man as undergoing an inner defeat.

*4, p.109
**7, p.232

"For the defeat his protagonists suffer is spiritual; they end in a spiritual frustration, a spiritual failure. His favorite theme is" (the special theme of American contemporary tragedy) "the degredation and disintegration of character."

Compare this with the following:

*"Moreover, though O'Neill says frankly now that he has 'finished with the naturalistic theatre', it is in a sense true that he has never in realism sought anything but a symbol; never in a concrete hero failed to shadow Man, the eternal protagonist, in the grip of natural forces greater than himself. O'Neill, fortunately for his popularity, swims in the forces of his times as he swims in the sea. His thought is intuitively molded by them."

**"Here at last the vise-like balance between yea and nay is broken", (idea of duality in earlier plays)"and the positive element in O'Neill's nature flows forward in a note of triumphant faith. Not the doubts of Caligula but the laughter of the man who descended into the shadow, rings out. And one sees at last, reflected on the page, the look of happy serenity that transforms the face of the swimmer as he strikes out into that blue sustaining sea."

And this:

***"Given a writer who betrays such close and naked contact with reality as does Eugene O'Neill, it is idle...to talk of optimism or pessimism. ... What we are more eager to learn about a writer who commands our interest and admiration is whether or not he has clothed himself with a self-directed

*6, p. 96
**ibid, p. 102
***2 M

"viewpoint. Perhaps universal vision is the more apt phrase... I do not think that O'Neill has as yet achieved such a view of the sum of things."

with this:

*"The maturing O'Neill looms impressively as a literary individualist as definitely set on self-expression as the rebellious boy was set on living his own life in his own sweetly exasperating way."

One might multiply opinions. But it seems wiser to go straight to the plays themselves.

"The Fountain" is the first, chronologically, of the plays that set forth a religion as the stuff of the drama. "The Fountain" deals with the quest of Juan Ponce de Leon for happiness. At first he thinks to find it in fighting for Spain. Later, he believes it lies in securing the love of Beatriz. But to win her love he must be young again. So he descends to torture and cruelty in his eagerness to discover the fountain of youth. He is betrayed and mortally wounded after he drinks of the supposed fountain. The play ends as follows:

Beatriz and her lover are heard singing the theme song of the play.

"Love is a flower
Forever blooming
Beauty a fountain
Forever flowing
Upward toward the source of sunshine,

* 1

"Upward toward the azure heaven;
One with God but
Ever returning
To kiss the earth that the flower may live.

(Juan listens in an ecstasy, bows his head, weeps. Then he sinks back with closed eyes exhaustedly. Luis enters from the monastery)

Luis: (hurries forward in alarm) Juan! (He hears the song and is indignant) Have they lost all feeling? I will soon stop-- (He starts for the door in rear)

Juan: (in a ringing voice) No! I am that song! One must accept, absorb, give back, become oneself a symbol! Juan Ponce de Leon is past! He is resolved into the thousand moods of beauty that make up happiness -- color of the sunset, of tomorrow's dawn, breath of the great trade wind -- sunlight on grass, an insect's song, the rustle of leaves, an ant's ambitions. (In an ecstasy) Oh! Luis, I begin to know eternal youth! I have found my Fountain! O Fountain of Eternity, take back this drop, my soul! (He dies)"

All this time the intelligent reader has been knitting his brows in an effort at recollection. "Where have I met you before", he wonders, as the philosophy of the play becomes more and more explicit. Now his brow clears. "The nineties", he exclaims. "Pater's 'Renaissance'."

He is quite right. Pater gave to the world the cult of beauty and the cult of sensation, of experience. Not the fruit of experience. Forming habits, Pater observed, that is, syn-

thesizing our experience into workable rules, was one of the failures of our civilization. As some wit has remarked, Pater spent his life in "earnest quivering in the presence of the beautiful." "To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame", to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life, he wrote.

In "The Fountain" the worship and ecstasy are directed rather pointedly toward nature. Where does this take us? Clearly to the underlying concept that nature, being worshipful, is Deity. There is nothing new here. It is the pagan idea that God created the world, and man in His image. Man became evil, but nature is still a manifestation of God. As man goes back to Nature, he goes back to God. But note. To go back to nature, man need only cease to struggle. He can give up all attempts to be an individual, sombody different, something human. He needs simply to relax, to accept, to wonder and adore. As he does so, slowly and marvelously, there seeps into his tired heart the overwhelming peace and beauty of nature,-- of God.

In this sense O'Neill is a naturalist, as Rousseau and the other Romanticists were naturalists. And a naturalist of this type has always claimed optimism. But as Irving Babbitt points out in his "Rousseau and Romanticism", this optimism is only the specious glitter of pessimism. Any naturalist is really a pessimist and a determinist. The more man worhips Nature, the more cruel and incomprehensible and ruthless becomes his idol, until at last he finds his goddess a Juggernaut, whose wheels crush out his individual existence and pass on. He can do nothing, unless he denies his god.

Perhaps the failure of "The Fountain" as a play may be traced in part to the dissatisfaction of the audience with O'Neill's mystical solution of the mystery of life. So many moderns have outgrown the nature worship that is here displayed; so many more, though they still bow in the house of Rimmon, have ceased to take seriously their act of faith; that the play leaves them unconvinced. It is as though a twelve-year old were asked to believe literally in Santa Claus. He can't. His youthful brain has flashes in which it grasps the truth underlying the myth, but he is afraid to say so, lest he be misunderstood as subscribing to the dogma. So O'Neill, in putting forward as his thesis in this play the dogma that beauty and youth as manifested in Nature are the answer to all the questions of life, has shocked his audience into denying that beauty and youth are the answer to any question.

Here is a weakness of O'Neill as a dramatist that Clark has pointed out.* The duty of a dramatist is to ask questions, not to answer them. At most, he may say to the audience: "Here is <u>one</u> answer". But the audience must be free to take it or leave it. They must not be coerced. In all three of the plays dealing primarily with religion, O'Neill seems to be attempting coercion. Where the concepts of God and religion enter only incidentally, on the other hand, he is far more successful. In "Fire Under the Andes", Elizabeth S. Sargeant makes this point.**

"... this Irish-American mystic, with his strange duality of being, has made his plays a projection of his struggles with

*6, pp.186-7
**7, pp.81-82

"the unmanageable universe..."

"Even the plays that fail to convince as art, or life, have an uncanny way of piercing the spectator in the ribs with some blade of vital truth."

In "Desire Under the Elms", one of the more objective of O'Neill's plays, he puts into the mouth of old Cabot a speech about God that is perfectly consistent with the man. We do not feel here that O'Neill has created a character who will voice his -- O'Neill's -- ideas, as Juan Ponce de Leon did in "The Fountain". It is Cabot himself, we believe, who says:*

"When ye kin make corn sprout out o' stones, God's living in yew. They wa'n't strong enuf fur that. They reckoned God was easy.... They're all underground -- fur follerin' arter an easy God. God hain't easy... God's hard, not easy! God's in the stones! Build my church on a rock -- out o' stones, and I'll be in them! That's what He meant to Peter!"

The reader or hearer of that speech is not antagonized by the fear that O'Neill is trying to convert him. Consequently, he is able to give an unprejudiced consideration to the thought, And to grant that the old man <u>had</u> figured out something, more than he realized himself. His words are symbols. God <u>is</u> hard. Life is hard. One may as well face that as a basic truth.

But that it <u>is</u> Cabot talking, and not O'Neill, one realizes anew in "Lazarus Laughed". Here O'Neill, the naturalist, has left the altar of sensation for the altar of accept-

*Desire Under the Elms, p.60

ance. He is now 33rd degree determinist. Lazarus has gone down into the grave. From the grave he has brought back the mystic Answer. And the answer is "Yes".

To the writer the answer does seem a rather obvious bit of naturalism, even when Lazarus O'Neill elucidates it:

* "There is only life! I heard the heart of Jesus laughing in my heart; 'There is Eternal Life in No', it said, 'and there is the same Eternal Life in Yes! Death is the fear between!' And my heart reborn to love of life cried 'Yes!' and I laughed in the laughter of God!"

One searches the play in vain for a translation of this ecstasy into a reasoned belief. From the fifty or more "Speeches" in which Lazarus speaks his faith, its pattern emerges as three concepts.**

I. "There is no death"

II. ("I (man) am Laughter, which is Life, which is the Child of God." For "There is only God! "Life is his Laughter."

III. ("If you can answer yes to pain, there is no pain! Believe! Men pass! Like rain into the sea! The sea remains! Man remains! "'Laughing, we give up our lives for Life's sake.' This must Man will as his end and his new beginning! He must conceive and desire his own passing as a mood of eternal laughter and cry with pride, 'Take back, O God, and accept in turn a gift from me, my grateful blessing for Your gift--

* Lazarus Laughed: p.22

** Ibid: p.45,73,85,95,158

("and see, O God, now I am laughing with You! I am
(Your laughter -- and You are mine!'"

If these three concepts be coldly translated, they mean that we believe that God is eternal and perfect, the source and end of all life. Each one of us is an aspect of God (His laughter). The whole duty of man is to remember that he is part of God, and to desire as speedily as possible to be joined into complete unity with God(-- even to committing suicide, as the chorus of followers have just done, to the great joy of Lazarus. The speech is an imaginary quotation of what they must have thought as they did so.)

The paradox of the play is apparent from this analysis. Life is laughter and is eternal. How then account for pain, cruelty, and apparent death? Plainly by denying their existence. Such a denial demands an act of faith so enormous that even Lazarus does not always achieve it. When the Nazarenes fight the Orthodox, and the Roman soldiers join in, so that "ten dead and mortally wounded lie on the ground",* Lazarus says "with infinite disdain: Sometimes it is hard to laugh -- even <u>at</u> men!" Again, when the crucified lion is dying, Lazarus says:** "Poor brother! Caesar avenges himself on you instead of me. Forgive me your suffering!" In the case of his own torture and death he is more successful. He dies, denying death, without apparently suffering from the flames.

But even if the reader is willing to accept the paradox as truth, he is not quite converted. A religion's va-

*Lazarus Laughed: p.41
**Ibid: p.104

lidity depends on its answer to the question, "What shall a man do to be saved?" In this case, even the proselyte must needs ask how to attain the spirituality necessary for a complete denial of the flesh.

The answer to the question is mystically vague. Laughter is the symbol of right living;* "the high duty to live as a son of God -- generously! with love! with pride! with laughter." To put it coarsely, if a man sees anything suffering, he should laugh, partly because he knows the suffering is not real, partly because his highest duty is to be happy himself. He achieves this happiness by acceptance, by drifting along the tide of circumstance, by <u>never</u> opposing the stronger will,-- in a word, by the mystic "Yes". It is a case of "whatever is, is right".**

The last paragraph is not intended as a caustic summary, merely as a brief one. But short or long, any summary of Lazarus' teachings shows them deterministic: and when, for any reason, man forgets that he must accept everything, his ** duty is to go again to Nature and get back the élan vital which consists of glorying in his own life.

In "Dynamo", the symbolism is simpler. The theme deals with the search of the new generation for God. The inadequacy of what O'Neill presumably considers the popular concept of religion is apparent in the sniveling self-contemptuous Rev. Hutchins Light. His religion, implicit and expressed in his words and thoughts, appears to consist of four concepts. God is personal; His will is manifest in His priest; He demands de-

*Lazarus Laughed: p.37
**cf. appendix ii

nial of the flesh; He also demands that His followers shall not resist evil.*

Over against Hutchins Light and his outworn faith O'Neill sets the new religion of Reuben Light. Here is what Reuben has to offer:

** "There is no God but Electricity!" Electricity is a personal god -- the*** "Great Mother of Eternal Life,... and Dynamo is Her Divine Image on earth". Her will is manifest in Her priest.**** "She wants some one man to love her purely and when she finds him worthy she will love him and give him the secret of truth". She demands denial of the flesh:***** "Dynamo would never find me worthy of her secret until I'd given up the flesh and purified myself". Her followers shall do Her will.****** "You've got to believe in Dynamo and bow down to her will."

Unfortunately Reuben murders Ada and kills himself before he quite discovers just what Her will is. His last words are: "I don't want any miracle, Mother! I don't want to know the truth! I only want you to hide me, Mother! Never let me go from you again! Please, Mother!"

Just how Reuben's Goddess is any improvement over his father's God, or just how Reuben's creed outclasses his father's creed, is hard to find. But one does note that the "new" religion is more frankly naturalistic than the old in its deification. That both are deterministic is obvious. Life consists in an effort to find out God's will and do it, regardless.

* See Appendix iii for quotations substantiating this analysis
** Dynamo: p.80
*** Ibid: p.134,135
**** Ibid: p.144

The new religion seems unsatisfactory to the O'Neill critics:

*"Dynamo adds nothing to our knowledge of the religion problem", observes Barrett Clark. "If it fails to do this and if at the same time it fails, as it almost entirely does, to move us as a work of art intended to be enjoyed in a theatre, then O'Neill is clearly on the wrong track... His power as a playright is unimpaired even though his ambitions efforts as a prophet and thinker are as a whole unimpressive. We have so many men who can think well, and so few artists."

The play, says O'Neill himself,** is a "symbolical and factual biography of what is happening in a large section of the American soul right now (loss of faith). It seems to me that any one trying to do big work nowadays must have this big subject behind all the little subjects of his plays and novels, or he is simply scribbling around on the surface of things and has no more real status than a parlor entertainer..."

In the Theatre Guild Magazine*** he has more to say about "Dynamo": "It is the first of a trilogy written on the general subject, more or less symbolically treated, of the death of the old god and the spiritual uneasiness and degeneration into which the sterile failure of Science and Materialism to give birth to a new God that can satisfy our primitive religious cravings, has thrown us".

One might infer from the above that O'Neill considers Reuben an example of this sterile failure, were it not for the overwhelming evidence of his other plays. In "Lazarus Laughed"

*4 M (also 6:p.192)
**Ibid
***7 Ma

and "The Great God Brown" he preaches naturalism, determinism and self-immolation almost ad nauseam. In "Strange Interlude", which immediately preceded "Dynamo", he is already toying lovingly with the idea of God the Mother. Nina says to Charlie, after confessing her inability to pray to "the modern science God":

*"The mistake began when God was created in a male image. Of course, women would see Him that way, but men should have been gentlemen enough, remembering their mothers, to make God a woman! But the God of Gods -- the Boss -- has always been a man. That makes life so perverted, and death so unnatural. We should have imagined life as created in the birth-pain of God the Mother. Then we would understand why we, Her children, have inherited pain, for we would know that our life's rhythm beats from Her great heart, torn with the agony of love and birth. And we would feel that death meant reunion with Her, a passing back into Her substance, blood of Her blood again, peace of Her peace! ... Now wouldn't that be more logical and satisfying than having God a male whose chest thunders with egotism and is too hard for tired heads and thoroughly comfortless? Wouldn't it, Charlie?

"Marsden (with a strange passionate eagerness) Yes! It would indeed! It would, Nina!"

Maybe O'Neill will discover some day why his answers to the problem of religion are unsatisfactory. They are unsatisfactory to his audience because, in the last analysis, they are unsatisfactory to him. For O'Neill is an individualist.

*Strange Interlude: p.77

Six years ago he said,* in a Philadelphia Public Ledger interview: "I intend to use whatever I can make my own, to write about anything under the sun in any manner that fits the subject. And I shall never be influenced by any consideration but one: Is it the truth as I know it -- or better still, feel it? If so, shoot, and let the splinters fly wherever they may. If not, not. This sounds brave and bold -- but it isn't. It simply means that I want to do what gives me pleasure and worth in my own eyes, and don't care to do what doesn't. ... It is just life that interests me as a thing in itself. The why and wherefore I haven't attempted to touch on yet."

Moreover, O'Neill is a protestant. That is, he has repudiated the religion of his fathers,-- not only Roman Catholicism, which would have given him the Virgin Mary to worship without all this trouble, but Christianity. He has set out to find a religion all his own -- individualism again.

But the essence of individualism and protestantism is an instinctive belief in free will. The individual protests against accepted faiths because, consciously or unconsciously, he is sure that he can work things out for himself, and work them out right. Now when O'Neill, free will individualist, came to work things out for himself, he worked out determinism, a philosophy that, in the last analysis, denies his ability to work it out. The writer believes that this inconsistency is the cause of two things: the unconvincingness of O'Neill's plays about religion, and the spiritual frustration which is so notable a characteristic of the character plays. He has

*1:p.5

tried to make bricks without straw, for the gospel he offers lacks the binding material of his own intellectual faith. He has asked for bread, and crazily accepted a stone. His plays are often a hopeless attempt to convince himself that the stone is the bread of life.

If this interpretation is valid, it explains why some of the earlier plays are happier than the later ones, for they antedate the formulas. It explains, too, why some of the plays are more convincing than others. That is, when O'Neill observes life without prejudice, he reports his observation as a study in harmony with his inmost belief that life has many aspects, that each has its own validity and truth. But when he tries to "see life steadily and see it whole", he neglects the essential nature of the individual in order to set it into his pattern. In other words, O'Neill can depict an individual: or he can compose a type. But he finds it almost impossible to show an individual who is typical, because the minute he tries to depict a type he falls prey to his obsession that there is only one type, (man the sport of circumstance) and he falsifies whatever his observation has shown him.

From studying the plays themselves, then, the writer has come to agree with Whipple's* presentation of O'Neill's philosophy of life, rather than with those critics who seem a bit inclined to be so carried away by rhetoric that they never see the skeleton within the charming coffer.

*quoted on p.11

Marriage

"Welded", written in 1923, is a three act study of the indissolubility of marriage. This is an interesting theme, but the play does not develop its possibilities. The point made is that married people can torture each other in proportion as they can make each other happy, but since they are "welded", the converse is true; they can make each other happy in proportion as they can torture each other, and -- corollary: no one else has this dual power. In illustration of his theme, O'Neill depicts the quarrel of Michael Cape and Eleanor in Act I. In Act II, Eleanor dashes off to John, who loves her, to revenge herself on Michael. Her husband goes to a prostitute. Both fail to get their revenge, apparently, as O'Neill himself might say, because they don't get any kick out of it. So in Act III they return to each other, deciding that love means suffering, and they will endure the ecstasy of suffering for the sake of the ecstasy of love.

The play illustrates O'Neill's theory of the human importance of emotion, of sensation. For in this one thing the two are welded, and this one thing is the essence of their lives. Of course such a view of life is tenable. Some readers and spectators may object that it is not <u>their</u> view, that

they believe both marriage and life have other, and equally important, aspects. But they are willing, and interested, to view Michael and Eleanor as individualists with a theory. They note, too, that O'Neill himself views these characters as distinct personalities, not, thank God, as symbols. When Michael enters, the stage direction says:

"(A circle of light appears with him, follows him into the room. These two circles of light, like auras of egoism, emphasize and intensify Eleanor and Michael throughout the play)"

The description of Michael shows how completely he is an individual rather than a type:

"Michael is 35, tall and dark. His unusual face is a harrowed battlefield of super-sensitiveness, the features at war with one another -- the forehead of a thinker, the eyes of a dreamer, the nose and mouth of a sensualist. One feels a powerful imagination tinged with somber sadness -- a driving force which can be sympathetic and cruel at the same time. There is something tortured about him -- a passionate tension, a self-protecting, arrogant defiance of life and his own weakness, a deep need for love as a faith in which to relax."

In "The First Man" O'Neill deals with a more cosmic aspect of marriage -- the frequent subordination of the woman's personality to the man's. In Act I, Martha Jayson says of her husband:* "He's found himself. His work has taken the place of the children.

Bigelow: And with you, too?

Martha (with a wan smile): Well, I've helped -- all I could.

*The First Man: p.152

"His work has me in it, I like to think -- and I have him."

The idea that Martha's personality is dominated by her husband's is brought out later in the act by old Mrs. Davidson, Curtis Jayson's aunt. She says:* "I have heard much silly talk of this being an age of free women, and I have always said it was tommyrot. ... She is an example. She is more of a slave to Curt's hobbies than any of my generation were to anything but their children. ... Where are her children?"

Later Martha tells Curtis they are going to have a child. He is intensely annoyed. Martha pleads with him:** "I love you! And I love the things you love -- your work -- because it's part of you. And that's what I want you to do -- to reciprocate -- to love the creator in me -- to desire that I, too, should complete myself with the thing nearest my heart!"

But Curtis is unable to see her viewpoint.*** "It's asking the impossible", he tells her finally. "I'm only human.

Martha: If you were human you'd think of my life as well as yours.

Curtis: I do! It's <u>our</u> life I am fighting for, not mine -- our life that you want to destroy.

Martha: Our life seems to mean your life to you, Curt -- and only your life. I have devoted fifteen years to that. Now I must fight for my own."

Curtis makes an impassioned plea for her love, and when, weakening, she begs him to face the facts, he suggests

*The First Man, p. 162
**Ibid: p. 184
***Ibid: p. 186

that she get rid of the child. Naturally, she is horrified. Act II ends in a storm of bewildered emotion. We do not see Martha again. In Act III the family are assembled in her living-room. The child is being born. Martha's groans are heard off-stage. At last the child is born, and Martha is reported dead.

The plot is complicated unpleasantly and perhaps unnecessarily by the persistent belief of the entire Jayson family except Curtis himself -- that the baby is Bigelow's child. Unnecessarily, because this seems to have nothing at all to do with the struggle of the two leading characters to express their own individualities and at the same time to retain their hold upon their love for each other.

This same struggle appears, though in a more pathological form, in "All God's Chillun Got Wings". But in the latter play, O'Neill offers a solution. In "The First Man" he does not, unless Martha's death is a symbol for the hopelessness of a woman's attempt to make marriage a free and equal partnership.

It may be that "All God's Chillun Got Wings" should be included in the group of plays dealing with social problems, since the play treats of the marriage of a white girl to a negro. Like most of O'Neill's plays, it fits into all the categories, and it is only because a general division is necessary to prevent discussion from being repetitious that one is justified in cataloguing them at all. But the theme of this play seems to be the etching of character by the acid of marriage,

and the fact that these characters are one negro and one white appears an incidental fact. Hence the play goes in the group with "Welded" and "The First Man" rather than in the social group or the character group. For in no other way than by marriage could Ella have so dominated Jim Harris.

Briefly: the play shows a jealous, neurotic white woman who is deeply ashamed because she has married the negro she loves. To compensate for her feeling of inferiority, she treats Jim and his family with utter contempt. She feels that intellectually as well as socially she is superior to him, and resolves that he shall never pass the bar exams, for which he studies night and day. For if he passed, she would have to admit the intellectual power of a negro. He, poor fellow, has an inferiority complex much deeper than hers, that makes him entirely lose his self-control in the presence of the whites, so that no matter how well prepared he is, he goes to pieces as soon as he starts on his examinations. But Ella, fearful lest he conquer this weakness, develops a wasting sickness and refuses to have any nurse except Jim, so that he will have no time to study. The play ends after the letter reporting Jim's failure, with Ella playing at being a child again and her besottedly adoring husband playing with her.

The play is at first sight an interesting study of the victory of a weak, unscrupulous nature over a strong and idealistic one. Jim is a good example of a fine character with a fatal flaw. Yet the play is pathetic, not tragic.

Perhaps this is because the protagonist does not really struggle. Jim is a fatalist. When Ella tells him she is free from her sordid affair with Mickey (this is before she marries Jim) Jim replies: "We're never free, except to do what we have to do."

The reader feels that this attitude of mind rather takes the heart out of Jim's struggles. They lack the desperate sincerity that O'Neill evidently meant them to show. And it is O'Neill's own fault. His psychology is excellent in detail, as always, but the character itself was not completely thought out before presentation. Hence O'Neill shows us in two different speeches two completely different concepts of the same man. In Act I Jim tells about preparing for the exams:

* "I work like the devil. It's all in my head -- all fine and correct to a T. Then when I'm called on -- I stand up -- all the white faces looking at me .... and all of a sudden it's all gone in my head. ... And it's the same thing in the written exames -- For weeks before I study all night ... I learn it all. I see it, I understand it. Then they give me the paper in the exam room. I look it over, I know each answer, perfectly."

The reader or spectator accepts this at its face value. Jim has a good mind, he believes. Then comes the end of the play.** Ella chatters along about their being children again. She will put blacking on her face and he can put chalk on his and they'll play marbles! Only he mustn't be a boy all the time. "Sometimes you must be my kind old Uncle Jim. ... Will you, Jim?"

*All God's Chillun Got Wings: p. 139
**Ibid: p. 175

"Jim (with utter resignation) Yes, Honey.

Ella: And you'll never, never, never, never leave me, Jim?

Jim: Never, Honey.

Ella: 'Cause you're all I've got in the world -- and I love you, Jim."

Up to this point the spectator has believed in the character of Jim. Probably even the reader has forgotten his single fatalistic statement. Jim has fought, and he is beaten.

But the next line upsets everything. Jim "suddenly throws himself on his knees and raises his shining eyes, his transfigured face). Forgive me, God, -- and make me worthy! Now I see Your Light again! Now I hear Your Voice! (He begins to weep in an ecstasy of religious humility) Forgive me, God, for blaspheming You! Let this fire of burning suffering purify me of selfishness and make me worthy of the child You send me for the woman You take away!"

The spectator, stunned, is forced to one of two conclusions. Either Jim has gone out of his mind, or else he was lying when he said he was really clear-headed and intelligent. But the reader, who has time to ponder, blames O'Neill. He should have let Jim alone, to be himself. Had he left out the speech, left Jim, in utter resignation and despair, saying to his silly vicious wife, "Honey, Honey, I'll play right up to the gates of Heaven with you!" the reader would feel sympathy for Jim's sacrifice of his life's ambition to his life's love. But when he declares that he is positively delighted to give up everything a man desires, that he was blaspheming when he wanted them, the reader is puzzled and hurt and disillusioned.

Character Types

In "The Dreamy Kid" O'Neill gives a much more convincing character sketch than in "All God's Chillun Got Wings". Here too the subject is a negro. But in this one act play, written in 1918, O'Neill is concerned, not with telling us how he thinks people should react to circumstance, but in reporting how one man did react. And in endeavoring to make an honest portrait of an individual, he has succeeded in doing much more. For this individual is a type. Consequently, O'Neill has shown us a character such as every author dreams of creating* -- a character at once individual and typical, and so representative. How eagerly O'Neill desires to achieve this end is shown in his straining for symbolism in the later plays -- a straining that defeats its own purpose. The symbolic characters, like those in the old morality plays, become so typical that they cease to be individuals at all. And though the actor may clothe them with a specious individuality in the performance of the play, they entirely lose their representative character when the play is read.

In "The Emperor Jones", however (1920) O'Neill has created a character who stands up whether the play is seen or read. There are analogies between this study of a shrewd, but uneducated Pullman porter who made himself emperor of a

*Clayton Hamilton: Manual of Fiction Ch.V

little island in the West Indies, and the historical Jean Christophe.* The play shows Brutus Jones self-confident, able, and fearless at first. But the natives revolt. Their method of revolt is a great voodoo meeting, which the audience does not see, but which is reported by Smithers in the last scene: "I tole yer yer'd lose 'im, didn't I? wastin' the ole bloomin' night beatin' yer bloody drum and castin' yer silly spells! Gawd blimey, wot a pack!"
Lem: (Gutturally) We cotch him."

Lem is quite right. Through six scenes we have seen the gradual disintegration of Jones' self-confidence, of his manhood, and finally of his sanity. The influence of the voodoo spells is shared by the audience as they listen to the eternal beat of the tom-tom, which never ceases until the Emperor is dead. This is one of O'Neill's methods of making the tale credible. The other is the casting of the protagonist as a negro, too newly emancipated from ignorance and superstition to be very firmly set in his self-reliance.

One suspects, however, that O'Neill's genius and not his conscious thought is responsible for the validity of this study. For, stripped of its trapping, the theme appears as his old favorite -- the impotence of man when confronted with the mystical powers of nature. But "The Emperor Jones" is a good play partly because of the semblance of struggle given by Jones' headlong flight and his desperate resistance, just as "Lazarus Laughed" and "Dynamo" are poor plays partly because the characters make no attempt to resist the overwhelm-

* cf."Black Majesty", John Vandercook

ing powers of Nature, but rather glory in their own helplessness.

In the two characters discussed, the "Dreamy Kid" and the "Emporer Jones", we have in the last analysis, discussed all of O'Neill's characters. He has but two Types in his plays. The characters he has observed and reported without consideration of their cosmic significance, and the characters he has created (whether he realizes it or not) to prove his thesis: that Man is the child of Nature, and that Nature is the female embodiment of the Old Testament Jehovah: "For I the Lord thy God am a jealous god, who visit the sins of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generations of them that hate Me: and show mercy unto thousands in them that love me, and keep my commandments." Of this second group, the Emperor Jones is, of course, one of "them that hate me"; Lazarus, on the other hand, belongs to "them that love me, and keep my commandments". The unfortunate "Hairy Ape" goes into the category with the Emperor Jones, for he is an individualist, to whom O'Neill chooses to teach his place. Reuben Light is a worshipper whose self-immolation is evidently intended as a glorious gesture.

Indeed, the larger part of O'Neill's characters belong to the second class mentioned above. They illustrate a theory. Sometimes O'Neill, who is weak as a logician, implies that his illustrations prove the theory (as in The Great God Brown). In most of the character plays, however, he becomes so interested in the illustration as half to forget the theory.

This is strikingly true in the much-discussed "Strange Interlude".

"Strange Interlude" presents a woman, Nina Leeds, in the chief emotional crises of her life for about twenty-six years. Since these crises inevitably concern various men, and since O'Neill's method in all his plays is to leave nothing unsaid that will conduce to clarity of understanding, it is inevitable that the play should be severely criticized from a moral standpoint. Perhaps the opinions of those who believe strongly that "Strange Interlude" should be suppressed are best summed up in an interview in which Judge Robert Grant,* a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, expresses his views.

"Judge Grant is a man of extremely conservative habit and bearing. His legal training and experience has made him careful of what he says for publication. For a quarter of a century he was judge of the Probate Court and during the same period he wrote and had published some 30 books. He combines the lawyer with the literary artist in an unusual personality. ...

"'Strange Interlude' is nothing more than a discussion of morbid sex psychology and is unfit for presentation, he thinks. He is somewhat surprised that Eugene O'Neill, whom he regards as an artist, should write such a play. He said that he believes O'Neill was brought to do so in order to please the so-called intelligentsia among whom he moves, his play being a justification of their 'modern' point of view concerning sex relationships among the unmarried.

*Interview by Charles P. Haven.

"His position, he told me, was carefully thought out and written as he would some years ago have written a coldly logical opinion when he was on the bench. He said in part:

"An easy-going world, outside of Boston, has already accepted the play 'Strange Interlude' that has caused all this bother. But our Mayor at least has shown himself a man of courage, and as the New York Times hinted in the pleasant article 'By-Products', Boston is entitled to its own opinion even against the world.

"'The essential inquiry in every controversy is "What are the facts?" Not many who are vociferously discussing this question have read the play.

"'I bought and read it months ago, as I do everything that O'Neill writes. He is an important literary artist, fearless and dynamic. I admire much of his art and some of its dramatic consequences. But I take off my hat to Mayor Nichols for his courageous verdict on "Strange Interlude" in the face of that portion of the younger generation intent on crowning all heroines of irregular sex life as Madonnas.

"'What does "Strange Interlude" portray except sexual vagaries spun out to the dimensions of a disagreeable surgical operation for the delectation of a too smart world?

"'The New York Times pointed out that there were no longer Puritans in Boston. True again. Either the langour of respectability or the maw of the young intelligentsia has absorbed them. The name of our censor is Casey, which suggests the race that has largely supplanted them in Boston.

"'As one who both Brahmin and a Unitarian helped for 30 years to keep the scales of justice even between Puritan and Catholic in this community, I know well the virtues of that race. Chief among them are spiritual decency and unwillingness to substitute for the things that are lovely and of good repute nauseous vagaries masquerading as naturalness.

"'If in this instance Boston makes herself ridiculous by her ban, so much the better. It was Boston who threw the tea chests overboard a centure and a half ago.

"'This challenge of Mayor Nichols to the complacency of the band of untrammelled but self-advertising young men and women who tell us what to read and say, will show at least that our majority, however bourgeoise, still purpose to keep sewers under cover.

"'Were Broun Heywood, Sinclair Upton and Edna Millay St. John (I throw a mantle of obscurity around these names) to parade down Fifth Avenue stark naked in midsummer, just to be cool and comfortable, this would be natural as Adam and Eve.

"'One has only to open the current Geographic magazine to see that the natives of primeval Papua do so still. But if in case some successor of Anthony Comstock should invoke an obscure Victorian law that landed them in jail, Boston would be able to answer "At last. Even sex appeal in the name of liberty has its proper reserves." As a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, I think it is time to cry a halt.'"

On the other side altogether is Dr. Abraham Myerson, eminent Boston neurologist, who writes in the Boston Herald of October 8, 1929 as follows:

"To the Editor of The Herald:

"I have seen 'Strange Interlude' and here are some of the reflections which the play called forth:

"First of all, the censor or censors fell into the prevalent error that sexual equals erotic. To people who are still fettered by childhood notions, sex is something to be whispered about, except perhaps to that repository of all the strange things of life, the doctor. But sexual may equal biological, as it does to the scientist; it may equal tragic, as it does to all the great dramatists; it may equal the comic, as it does to farceur and travelling salesman; it may be a source of illness, as it seems to the psychoanalyst. The erotic phases of it are insignificant compared to its biologic, tragic, comic, catastrophic phases. Apparently, sex must be drained of its endocrines and toned and whittled down into sentimentality before it becomes acceptable to our rulers.

"In 'Strange Interlude', the sexual phase is mainly tragic, though it comes perilously near the comic at times. (As when Nina sits knitting or sewing with the three men who love her in a kind of inverted harem.) That any one can find lewdness in a play in which sexual irregularity brings tragic disorganization of character (the downfall of the lover, Darrell), in which illicit love causes a boy to hate his real father, and finally impels

"the son to strike him in the face with a blow that shocks an audience into frozen horror--that any one can find anything erotic in a play replete with such incidents shows that such a one is like the schoolmistress' clock which struck 13 'not to tell the time o' day but because there's something wrong with its insides.' It takes an obsessive pruriency to pick out the erotic phases of 'Strange Interlude,' and if any one had forbidden desires before he witnessed the play, he could get no comfort or sanction for his passion from O'Neill's masterpiece.

"The second set of impressions which the play left me with concern the famous observation of William James that we tend to pick out of the stream of life just those few things that interest us. The censor is mainly interested in the sexual, so he sees the play as erotic, obscene or what not. But one could easily say that as important a theme is the spirit of renunciation which runs through the drama, in the refusal of Darrell to claim his love and his child because that would hurt his friend, Sam; in the continuous self-sacrifice of good old Charlie; in the fettered Nina herself who will not go with the man she loves because she is mother both to her son and her deceived husband. And running through the play is the protective father spirit of the rather ridiculous Professor which becomes transmitted like a mantle to the rather ridiculous Charlie. How about the fierce mother spirit of the elder Mrs. Evans, who shields her son from the knowledge of the impending disaster of his insane heredity and imposes on her daughter-in-law a neces-

"sity to protect the husband she despises and to deceive him, a deception which restores him to self-confidence and by its imputed virility brings him power and wealth?

"The play says clearly that a scientist like Darrell cannot have two mistresses, science and another man's wife, and its most poignant and tragic scenes concern themselves with the breakdown of his personality through his divided life, while his regeneration comes when passion disappears and the great mistress Science calls to her lover.

"'Perhaps 'Strange Interlude' is best interpreted as a struggle between the starkly male lover, Darrell, and the non-sexual father lover, Charlie. Passion finally meets defeat, and the Nina who has yielded her all to its heat turns at last to the peace of an understanding and protective love. The pattern of the sexual in this fascinating play is thus interwoven with the rich and varied patterns of life itself.

"Since I am not a professional critic of the drama, I can not say with any authority whether or not 'Strange Interlude' is a great play. I fall, back, shamelessly, on the good old cry of the amateur, 'I know what I like." There are places which offend my own egoism, as when the main dramatis personae are depicted as having rheumatism of the back and an ungainly gait in the late 40s and the early 50s. I think the psychoanalytic touches of the first few scenes, as for example, the father complex of the Professor and Nina, and the mother complex of Charlie are a bit naive. Now and then the extraordinarily effective asides become unreal, and the frozen actors look perilously like wax figures. The end-

"ing, with the caricatured Charlie and the chastened Nina, settling down, made me squirm a bit and mutter 'a sappy ending'. But all in all, I revelled in the play; the nine acts (or nine innings as a graceless nephew expressed it) never once lost their grip on me, and the deep insight of the playwright into our hidden but conscious selves made me realize that our deepest understanding of our fellow-men may come from the stage.

"I paraphrase a tragic sentence of one of the characters when I say that I hope that the banning of this brilliant play from the Boston stage as well as the tyrannical banning of fine books from the shops of our city will some day be a Strange Interlude between the historic and renowned Boston of the past and a gracious, tolerant and civilized future. Abraham Myerson!"

Whatever conclusion the individual may reach as to the morality or the immorality of the play, no one who has seen the play presented has yet claimed that Nina is anything but real. This reality seems due to two things:-- the one mentioned above -- O'Neill's absorption in his characters -- and his method of depiction, of which more later.

To leave "Strange Interlude" for "The Great God Brown" is like passing from a clinic to a revival meeting. However pathological the subjects of a clinic may be, an intelligent observer cannot fail to be fascinated by the treatment which the doctors work out and apply. It is so sure, so founded upon the rocks of their knowledge and experience, and so carefully experimental wherever it is not sure. But an intelligent ob-

server is likely to be uncomfortable in a revivalist tent. The irrational appeal to sheer emotion is disturbing. When this is followed by an attack upon intellect as such, it is distressing.

But this is just exactly what O'Neill does in "The Great God Brown". The more carefully one reads this play, the more one is inclined to agree with Maxwell Bodenheim, when he says:*

"Unconsciously--the creator is never aware of such transitions--he (O'Neill) fell under the influence of his critical 'highbrow' admirers, men such as George Jean Nathan, H. L. Mencken, Kenneth MacGowan, and Stark Young, and became convinced that he was a deeply poetic and sentimental peerer into the myths and quests of past men, and an airy satirist of manners and motive.

"He deserted the crude underdogs and submerged gropers, whose souls he had pierced and lighted with an accuracy near to genius, and entered a figurative drawing room thronged with the lights and modulations of a more precious world. The alteration has been both mournful and inadequate."

Add to this a comment by Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant that also shows insight:**

"O'Neill started with a twist -- the twist of revenge. Life had made him glowing promises. Life had failed to keep them. He would pay it back in his own coin for its betrayals", and one has the necessary background for a true understanding

*2 N
**Fire Under the Ardes: p.87

of this extraordinary play."

For in "The Great God Brown" O'Neill tries to accomplish a dual purpose. First, he wishes to put over, in the figure of Dion Anthony this time, his own philosophy of naturalism. Second, he wishes to attack, in the guise of William Brown, every one who opposes this philosophy. Now it must be obvious by this time that the essence of O'Neill's naturalism is surrender to nature,-- letting oneself be engulfed in a sea of sensation. Over and over again Dion preaches this religion of O'Neill's:* "I love, you love, we love! Come! Rest! Relax! Let go your cluth on the world! Dim and Dimmer! Fading out into the past behind! Gone! Death! Now! Be born! Awake! Live! Dissolve into dew--into silence--into night--into earth--into space--into peace--into meaning--into joy--into God--into the Great God Pan!"

This sort of thing makes a great hit with Margaret, and also with Cybel, the prostitute whom O'Neill makes a priestess of the cult in which Dion in High Priest. She explains to Billy Brown why Dion is so attractive to women -- "He's alive!" As the play goes on, Dion, drunk, becomes boastful of his success.**

"I've Loved, lusted, won and lost, sang and wept! I've been life's lover! I've fulfilled her will and if she's through with me now it's only because I was too weak to dominate her in turn. It isn't enough to be her creature, you've got to create her or she requests you to destroy yourself."

*The Great God Brown: p.24
**Ibid: p.61

"I was too weak" is the keynote to Dion's character. He was too weak to make a success of his chosen work, painting. Of course he doesn't phrase it that way.* He says he realized he couldn't be an artist, except in living. Then it presumably occurs to him that hard drinking and gambling may not be artistry in living, and he adds, with a bitter laugh, "and not even in that". One wonders at first why this is not artistry in living from Dion's point of view. Later, however, it appears that drinking and gambling must have failed because by them he could not get in touch with the "Earth Mother" -- symbolized by Cybel, the prostitute. With her alone can Dion take off his mask and be himself. She must be the life urge, fertility,** -- "I'm so damn sorry for the lot of you, every damn mother's son-of-a-gun of you, that I'd like to run out naked into the street and love the whole mob to death like I was bringing you all a new brand of dope that'd make you forget everything that ever was for good."

O'Neill does not think this weakness of Dion's is a flaw. On the contrary, it would seem that the weaker he is, the more he drinks and the less he works, the nobler he becomes. This is implied by the descriptions of Dion's real face: In the prologue, his own face is*** "dark, spiritual, poetic, passionately supersensitive, helplessly unprotected in its childlike, religious faith in life". In Act I, seven years later:**** "His real face has aged greatly, grown more strained and tortured, but at the same time, in some queer

* The Great God Brown: p.28
** Ibid: p.48
*** Ibid: p.14
**** Ibid: p.26

"way, more selfless and ascetic, more fixed in its resolute withdrawal from life". When we see him at Cybel's, in scene three of Act I:* "His pale face is singularly pure, spiritual and sad". Act II comes after another seven year cycle.** "Dion is now prematurely gray. His face is that of an ascetic, a martyr, furrowed by pain and self-torture, yet lighted from within by a spiritual calm and human kindliness." In scene two: "His own face is gentler, more spiritual, more saintlike and ascetic than ever before". Finally, when he dies, we see "his Christian Martyr's face at the point of death".

Thus we must conclude that Dion's self-indulgence and unkindness to his wife have had exactly the opposite effect to what a commonplace realist might suppose!

Here endeth the first lesson -- the presentation of the protagonist. It has been quoted without comment, for indeed the lines themselves seem adequate commentary on so strained and forced an hypothesis. But even more astonishing is O'Neill's depiction of the antagonist. To understand this fully the reader needs to do a little preliminary analysis himself. Dion is the apotheosis of surrender, of weakness, of the suffering that results from "super-sensitiveness" to life. Billy Brown must obviously be the exact opposite. But here O'Neill encountered a difficulty. Most people are so composed that they incline to admire the opposite of Dion's qualities,-- persistence, strength, control of one's emotions. What was O'Neill to do? Well, he evidently concluded that he could make

* The Great God Brown: p.39
** Ibid: p.46

his audience reverse their admiration if he carefully implied that such qualities were hopelessly bourgeois and unspiritual, besides laying a man open to the suspicion of being intellectually superior. Moreover, if these qualities are seen to crumple, to melt into adoration for their opposites, then the audience will be forced to admit either that the qualities were weak or the man was weak, and so convert their admiration for him into admiration for the greater weakness that overcame him.

Here are the quotations that seem to the writer to admit such an inference:

Billy, in the prologue, has a* "frank good-humored face, its expression already indicating a disciplined restraint. His manner has the easy self-assurance of a normal intelligence." In Act I** "He has grown into a fine-looking, well-dressed, capable, college-bred American business man, boyish still and with the same engaging personality". In Act II*** "Brown sits in a chair at left reading an architectural periodical. His expression is composed and gravely receptive. In outline, his face suggests a Roman consul on an old coin. There is an incongruous distinction about it, the quality of unquestioning faith in the finality of its achievement".

Because of his love for Margaret, Billy assumes Dion's mask after the latter's death. This is when he wavers from his own character, becoming more and more like Dion until he too dies. But there is enough of the original Billy left to make Margaret utterly happy in her husband's change of character.

*The Great God Brown: P.11
**Ibid: p.33
***Ibid: p.59

* "Margaret: I've been so happy lately, dear--and so grateful to you! (He stirs uneasily. She goes on joyfully) Everything's changed! I'd gotten pretty resigned to--and sad and hopeless, too--and then all at once you turn right around and everything is the same as when we were first married--much better even, for I was never sure of you then. You were always so strange and aloof and alone, it seemed I was never really touching you. But now I feel you've become quite human--like me--and I'm so happy, dear!"

She goes on to tell Billy (whom she believes to be Dion) how pleased the boys are with the change in their father.

** "Brown:(brokenly) I--I'm glad.

Margaret: Dion! You're crying!

Brown: (stung by the name, gets up -- harshly) Nonsense! Did you ever know Dion to cry about any one?

Margaret: (sadly) You couldn't--then. You were too lonely. You had no one to cry to."

There are readers who might give a harsher name than loneliness to the super-sensitive Dion's insensitiveness to the needs of his wife and children. These same readers might be touched by Billy's life-long devotion to Margaret. They might even feel a thrill of guilty sympathy with him when Dion says:

*** ... "Why hasn't Brown had children--he who loves children--he who loves <u>my</u> children--he who envies me <u>my</u> children?" and Brown answers: "(brokenly) I'm not ashamed to envy you them!"

A thrill of guilty sympathy? the reader may ask. Yes.

* The Great God Brown: p.79
** Ibid: p.80
*** Ibid: p.64

Because, since Billy is the antagonist, held up to ridicule in the very title of the play, it is evident that these natural human desires of his, for a wife, for children, for an honorable and successful business career, are unworthy desires, -- contemptible and evil. Moreover, the martyr-hero, Dion, hates Billy "with terrible hatred".* In Act I** he voices the reason: "He's bound heaven-bent for success. It's the will of Mammon". Later, he hates him because Billy gives him a job.*** "Now I'll have to foreswear my quest for Him and go in for the Omnipresent Successful Serious One, the Great God Mr. Brown, instead! (He makes him a sweeping, mocking bow)" Later still, he voices jealousy of Billy as regards Cybel.**** "Are you in love with your keeper, Old Sacred Cow? .. (Brown is supporting Cybel) Then you've lied when you said you've loved me, Old Filth?" He thinks that Brown has attained success in business only through him.***** "I've been the brains! I've been the design! I've designed even his success... And this cathedral is my masterpiece."

There must be more than one reader of "The Great God Brown" who lays down the book with a shocked conviction that O'Neill has seriously tried to make the worse appear the better cause, that Dion's character is really petty, selfish, weakly boastful, dominated by sexual lust, and that Billy is the true idealist, who is ruined by giving up his own faith and attempting to join Dion's church, and subscribe to the creed of Naturalism.

* The Great God Brown: p.62
** Ibid: p.30
*** Ibid: p.45
**** Ibid: pp.47-48
***** p.63

Unfortunately, too, O'Neill has to a certain extent succeeded. The play was successful not only with the critics but with the public.* O'Neill's own explanation of this phenomenon is quoted by Clark.*

"I somehow feel there's enough in it to get over to unsophisticated audiences. In one sense 'Brown' is a mystery play, only instead of dealing with crooks and police it's about the mystery of personality and life. I shouldn't be surprised if it interested people who won't bother too much over every shade of meaning, but follow it as they follow every story. They needn't understand with their minds, they can just watch and feel."

If O'Neill is right, here is an instance of a case where good technique puts over substance that is not only of inferior grade but, some people will agree, actually harmful in its results.

"Marco Millions" deals more lightly and more successfully with the same theme. Here Billy Brown is Marco Polo, a shrewd, materialistic business man, utterly insensitive to the spell of real beauty (as represented by the Princess Kukachin) or real wisdom (as incarnate in the Great Kaan). To see the play is to revel in its gorgeous beauty of setting, to laugh without malice at the bustling, self-important Marco,-- and to admire the excellent acting of the Theatre Guild. But one should not read it over carefully for a thesis! For at once questions begin to obtrude themselves. Is that Beauty really so admirable and lovely that dies rather than face realities? And is that Wisdom really great which lives serenely above tor-

* The play ran for nearly a year."
6: p.163

ture and oppression, which is horrified by gunpowder but will allow helpless villagers to be flogged to death to carry the body of a dead girl more speedily; which finds no answer to life but sorrow, resignation and death? All O'Neill's symphonies are in the same Key. And the Key is the pessimism of the man who hates mankind, and worships a Deity of irreconcilible attributes, beneficent Mother Nature, "red in tooth and claw".

Perhaps the expression "who hates mankind" seems unsubstantiated. It is based upon three observations. First, the insistence in so many of the plays of the unimportance and worthlessness of individual life.* Moreover, O'Neill does not flinch from carrying this thought to its logical conclusion, even in regard to the children of his own brain. He kills them off with an indifference that speaks for itself. Despite the present unpopularity of the "bloody endings" that delighted the Elizabethans, the audiences at O'Neill's plays sit watching murder and sudden death in a large proportion of the plays.** That they can enjoy the plays at all must be due, must it not? either to their feeling that the characters deserved to die, or that they were better off dead.

Now an artist who can make an audience seriously feel that his characters would better die than not, has a curiously pessimistic twist. No one who believes in humanity or loves mankind can consider extinction the general solution of life's problems. It is an answer, but not the best answer. That O'Neill believes it the best answer gives justification to the

* Vide quotations supra: esp. from "Lazarus Laughed"and "The Great God Brown".

** In a footnote to 6: p.123

thought that he is no lover of humanity. He likes to see his characters go down to defeat. If not, why make defeat inevitable?

He does make defeat inevitable because he breaks his characters on a torture wheel of emotional obsession from which they can no more escape than could the unhappy criminals of the middle ages from the actual wheel on which the executioners bound them.

Barrett Clark says:* "Of the thirty-five O'Neill plays I have seen or read, there are only five in which there is no murder, death, suicide, or insanity. In the others I find a total of six suicides and one unsuccessful attempt; ten important murders (not counting incidental episodes referred to in the text); nineteen deaths, nearly all due to violence; and six cases of insanity."

O'Neill watches their struggles with the impassivity of a vivsectionist intent upon evolving a law. Not one character in O'Neill's plays has a chance to control the emotions that torture and finally defeat him. The only character who retains his iron integrity is Marco Polo. And him O'Neill has attempted to crucify on a cross of contempt because he <u>feels</u> no emotions. If this is not the work of a man who hates his fellowmen, what possible excuse <u>has</u> O'Neill for his ruthless cruelty?

Thirdly, may not one infer O'Neill's dislike of humanity from the selection of his types? His heroes are often men of the lowest mental capacity, such as Reuben Light, or "Yank". His heroines are (accidental) prostitues or women ab-

*In a footnote to 6: p.123

normally over-sexed or vicious. When he does depict a man of any mental attainment, he either makes him an intelligent but selfish individualist, like Brutus Jones or Curtis Jayson, or else he uses him as a horrible example of the inadequacy of mere intellect -- as are Billy Brown and Marco Polo. The two women in his plays who seem fairly normal sexually are Martha Jayson (whom he kills) and the heroine of "The Straw", Eileen Carmody, who is presently to die of tuberculosis.

Setting

*"...Contemporary creativeness has brought to light a fourth unity,-- unity of impression". These words sum up practically all there is to say about O'Neill's use of setting. His settings are all effective in the sense that they seem an integral part of the play. The flower is native to the soil. It would die if transplanted. This is true even when the character of the setting seems at first negligible, as in "The GreatGod Brown". But try to transplant "The Great God Brown" from the smallish modern city where it grows to Chicago, for instance -- and at once the situations are falsified. The same analysis may be used on every play. O'Neill is masterly in making the spectator or reader feel the inevitability of the place.

His settings fall into four groups. The exotic and foreign setting came first, in the one act plays, and he still uses it when necessary, as in"Marco Millions". The second type is the solitary, rather sordid, New England country scene. He uses as a variant of this the deserted harbor, as in "Diff'rent" and "Gold". The small city is perhaps his present favorite, and he handles it caustically, as in "The First Man", "Strange Interlude" and "Dynamo". Finally, he has certain plays in which the setting is an integral part of the plot, notably "The Straw",

*4: p.310

where the main action is laid in a sanatarium, and the two expressionistic plays, "The Emperor Jones" and "The Hairy Ape".

About all these settings there is but one pertinent comment to make. O'Neill knows them thoroughly. One does not need to read his biography to learn this, though indeed the biography confirms the statement. But he who runs may read. They could not be stuff of the stuff of the play were not O'Neill able to walk their purlieus as familiarly as the decks of his own soul.

Summary

To sum up: it appears evident that the content of O'Neill's plays shows certain significant trends in modern drama. His subjects are sociological and philosophic. Indeed, as we have seen, they are becoming increasingly so, to the actual detriment of their worth as drama, as O'Neill grows to be more and more the preacher and proselityzer, and less and less the artist. Secondly, his characters are unheroic people. They are even more often of the proletariat than of the middle class, half-educated, of low intelligence capacity, ruled almost without exception of sheer emotion. Their ideals are the ideals of people who lack the clarifying power of intellectual analysis, turgid, vague, full of high-falutin words but embittered by illogical hatred. The situations in which the characters move are almost more settings than plot, so incidental are they to the character depiction and development, while the settings themselves are realistic even when most romantic, and carefully worked out so that they are an essential part of the play.

Part II

Method

Romanticism.

To make the transition from content to form is easy when discussing the works of Eugene O'Neill. For both subject and treatment have a single characteristic -- a characteristic that has impressed the reviewers no less than the public. That characteristic is* "a tense, driving emotional sincerity".

Under the spur of this urge O'Neill has availed himself of every type of form, the conventional and the modern, the realistic and the symbolic, the expressionist of the "naturalist", -- the road mattered not, so long as the goal was attained. Evidently, then, when O'Neill came into prominence, he would be claimed by rival schools, each with a modicum of reason for its claim. Inevitably, too, the reviewers would each take a fling at classifying and summing up his work. (It is to be hoped, a bit prematurely.) Here follow the best of the critical analyses of O'Neill's "method".

** "Eugene O'Neill ... has been claimed already by several schools, including that vague aggregation known as "the younger

*1: p.286
**8: pp.70,71,72

"school". One set of readers will maintain him to be a stark realist, taking their cue from "Diff'runt*..."

"He is clearly an emotional playwright, others will say, urging the case of "The Straw", where the love for each other of two consumptives is handled with true pathos. If the 'Emperor Jones' be taken as the test, he is surely an impressionist and a fantastic. 'Anna Christie' seems to show romantic possibilities, and 'The Hairy Ape' bites deep as any satire. He makes a wide appeal, not only for these reasons, but also because the austere heart of Boston warms to his Puritan spirit, while impatient and intolerant young Chicago responds to his vigour. It seems, nevertheless, that there is unity in the varied forms of his plays, and that a single motive lies behind them. It may roughly be summed up in a word as the motive of illusion -- the study of that infinite capacity of self-deception which has been the despair of the moralist, the joy of the cynic, and the stumbling-block of the reformer. In general, people who deceive themselves come off very poorly as imaginative characters and the heinousness of their crime is forgotten in the enormity of its punishment. But the subject has tremendous possibilities, and O'Neill, who is humane to the point of occasional weakness,** has discovered most of them.

"In 'Diff'rent'* the play has a stern moral quality, for this is a play of an unsatisfied ideal.

"'The Emperor Jones' has a simple, universal appeal. Here the illusion is the power of fear, which grows from a hint and

* The misspelling is in the book quoted
** In Pt. I, pp.50-53 the writer has expressed disagreement with this idea.

"a tremor into an overmastering reality and compels the spectator himself to become an actor in the drama. It is the old test of subjectivity; unless we are Jones, the drama fails."

Hamilton has a few general comments to make before he discusses O'Neill's method as a whole. As the comments bear upon his statement that O'Neill's drama is romantic in treatment, they are given below:

O'Neill's* "range of experience (is) limited. What he knows about humanity he knows intensely; but there is still a great deal that he does not know." He can't write about aristocrats, Hamilton thinks. In "The Hairy Ape" the dialogue between the aristocratic young girl and her ~~mother~~ aunt is absolutely ? false, does not ring true. "His range of mood is ... rather limited. He is not entirely devoid of humor; but his humor is of a rather grim, sardonic sort. ... He is at his best when dealing with the terrible; and, by the terrible, I mean the horrible transfigured to a higher plane by the intercession of imagination.

"His method is essentially romantic. Much of his work has a realistic look, because of his habit of adopting a great many details from actuality; but he reasons from the general to the particular, and always there is an abstract idea at the centre of his concept. He is sometimes mistaken for a realist because of the minor fact that his characters talk like those of a realistic author who has kept his ears open; but none of his work is photographic in its method. You will observe that he always starts out with a theme and invents a story that shall

*5: p. 212,214,215

illustrate his abstract thesis in terms that are concrete; and that is the final proof that he is not a realist."

Although Hamilton is apparently using the word "romantic" here in a special sense, as he takes pains to show, Cestre* agrees with him in his conclusion, though he too is careful to define what he means by romantic.

"O'Neill se présente, en surface, comme un observateur réaliste et un psychologue rompu aux méthodes de laboratoire. Au fond, il a conservé le goût romantique (ou néo-romantique) des sentiments de l'exception, des sursauts violents de la sensibilité et d'imagination, des scènes d'égarement, des surprises sensationelles, et (parce qu'il est très moderne) du frisson charnel. Ce que le'intéresse surtout, ce sont les complications psychiques qu'entraînent les aventures ... de la passion, les chocs qui résultent des contradictions de l'experience, les tourments que s'installent pour longtemps apres les brefs éclairs de joie ..."

Andrew Malone, in the Contemporary Review, remarks, "Of O'Neill's method there is not much to say, except that it is different in every play". But he concludes that O'Neill is "essentially romantic". His analysis of the "motif" varies superficially from the last two quoted.** The motif that every one envies the work and life of others seems to be an obsession with O'Neill. The theory of Progress is founded on such discontent. But O'Neill's characters as they change their work go steadily down. This is not "all" the truth of human ex-

*5 M: p.143 See also p. 64
**paraphrase, 3M

perience, Malone thinks. Is this not the idea of "illusion" advanced by the other writers quoted?

Some American reviewers are trying to coin a new word for O'Neill's method of psychological analysis.*

"O'Neill says he will probably use his new technique in all his plays from now on. Editors feel that this is necessary in view of the tremendous impetus given the study and knowledge of psychology in the last 25 years. O'Neill 'by breaking down the barriers of the realistic Ibsen theatre, has opened the way for what might be termed, for want of a better word, a super-realism -- a realism that takes into account not only the external actions or behavior of the character, but also the inner workings of the conscious and subconscious mind'."

Donald Clive Stuart of Princeton in the Department of Dramatic Art (quoted by Lawrence Langner) remarks:** "It has been said that O'Neill has used the method of a novelist" (in"Strange Interlude") "... But 'Strange Interlude' is a play in every sense of the word. ... The play is not subtle in the sense that we must indulge in creative thinking, as we must in symbolistic or expressionistic drama..." He goes on to suggest that perhaps it is a "super-naturalistic drama", i.e. it gives us the spiritual world of expressionism, plus the externalities of life, depicted in necessary detail. Practically, however, the term "super-realism" is a limited term, applied to a detail of method, and does not invalidate Hamilton's conclu-

*7 M b (unsigned)
**7 M b

sion that O'Neill's method is romantic, in the sense that it is selective, even though the words "super-realism" emphasize the masterly use of detail in depicting the selections.

Another special method, that of expressionism, deserves notice, though O'Neill seems now to have abandoned it. Malone says of "The Emperior Jones":* "In the incidents of the flight one is reminded of Andreyev's method of externalizing states of mind by speech and action, a method which is now supposed to be ultra modern under the name of expressionism.

Malone does not find expressionism in "The Hairy Ape", evidently, for he says of it:* "'The Hairy Ape' is an extraordinary blend of weird fantasy and extreme realism, of satire and symbolism". There is, however, expressionism, too, in the "blend",-- found notably in the scene where Fifth Avenue is depicted on a Sunday morning.

Another example of expressionism is shown in the stage directions for "All God's Chillun Got Wings", Act II, scene ii.** The scene is the home of Jim and Ella Harris, already described in scene i. "The walls of the room appear shrunken in, the ceiling lowered, so that the furniture, the portrait, the mask look unnaturally large and domineering".

The method of expressionism, being purely subjective, is of course romantic under Hamilton's definition. Even should O'Neill return to it, he will continue to be a romanticist. And even if the critics accept him as a super-realist, they must admit that the term is only a distinguishing one for his favorite kind of romanticism.

* 3 M
** All God's Chillun Got Wings, p. 161

Character Analysis

It was inevitable that some term should be found for O'Neill's method of character analysis. For character analysis is the dominant interest, not only of O'Neill, but of all modern drama. Dickinson prophesied this in 1915.*

"By this we mean that the drama will treat not the fixed and crude types of an outworn art that misrepresented a past society, but the real experiences of men and women, the veritable fortunes of their lives, the adjustments they have had to make to a civilization that has rapidly changed front."

Henderson, in analyzing "The Changing Drama"** (1914) worked out five characteristic features of the new drama, in every one of which character analysis is implicit as an integral part. They are as follows:

"1. The transposition of the crucial conjunction from the outer world to the inner life.

"2. The enlargement of the conception of the dramatic conflict in order to include the clash of differing conceptions of conduct, standards of morality, codes of ethics, philosophies of life.

"3. The participation in such conflicts not only of individuals, but also of type embodiments of social classes or even segments of the social classes in themselves.

* 3: p.205
** 4: p.182,183

"4. The elimination of both conflict and crisis without denaturization of the literary species known as the play.

"5. The invention of the technique by which a single subject is explored from many points of view, as distinguished from the earlier technicque in which many subjects are exhibited from a single point of view."

Cestre* shares this point of view:

"Le nouveau théatre américan se range de plus en plus, á la suite d'Ibsen, de Dostoiewsky et de Bataille, dans l'école qui plonge jusq'au tréfond des mystères de l'âme et en libère les bouillonnement les plus tumultueux. O'Neill se place en tête du mouvement. Son oeuvre a suivi une progression continue dans le sens de la divination, qui cherche a pénétrer les arcanes du subconscient, et vers la hardiesse, que ne laisse inexprimés aucun des élans les plus éperdus ou les plus crus. ...

"Ce theâtre ... est l'interpretation parlée et mimée de l'illusion humaine. ... Ils (les hommes) aspirent frénétiquement au bonheur et n'en atteignent jamais que la fantome ... Et pourtant, si ces êtres tourmentées devaient refaire leur vie, ils en rechercheraient encore les ideals illusoires. C'est parce que le theâtre d'O'Neill, a l'arrière-plan du pessimisme contient en puissance cette aspiration vers les sommets -- fussent-ils de nuées ou de miasmes -- qu'il a sur nous sa puissante emprise et sa force d'emotion."**

* 5 M: p. 131

** The discussion by M. Cestre of the "motif" has been included here rather than with those on p. 60 because he has written it as the conclusion of his article, and it logically follows his preliminary statements.

Here we have almost a fusion of motif with method,-- a fusion that does not, however, prevent us from seeing clearly that Cestre agrees with the other critics as to O'Neill's method, -- which is, briefly, a kind of psychological flaying that lays bare quivering muscles and torn nerves.

* "C'est la même méthode d'explorer les âmes, la même poursuite ardente des pensées secretes, le même gout des aspirations démesurées et des explosions volcaniques."

His detailed analysis of the method, however, is worth quoting:**

"Ce que nous voulons remarquer, c'est la place que prend, dans le théâtre d'O'Neill, la passion integrale, surgie des profondeurs, se deployant dans l'ordre physique et l'ordre moral, sans entrave ni reticence. La pensée consciente est submergée, la volonté refléchie defaille; l'impulsion, dans la sauvagerie, emporte les barrieres qui pourraient dresser la morale, les sentiments de famille, la pudeur, ou l'honneur. Dans 'Gold' la soif du metal jaune entraîne un chercheur ... a la démence. Anna Christie ... oscille de la prostitution a l'amour, en parfaite innocence. Dion Anthony, dans 'The Great God Brown', artiste miné par l'abus d'alcool et les écarts de conduite, domine de toute la hauteur du genie l'homme d'affaires rangé (au moins en apparence) qui sauve de la misère et de la faim la famille du peintre bohème. Tout cela, presenté avec des nuances, des finesses d'analyse, un sens du mystère de l'âme, qui fait de ces pieces tout autre chose que des paradoxes im-

* 5 M: contrasting "Lazarus Laughed" with "Strange Interlude"
** Ibid: p.132

"moralistes ou de plats mélodrames.

"C'est la même outrance de sentiments, la même audace d'observation et d'expression, la même penetration imaginative, la même exploration subtile des étrangetés du moi, que caractérisent, à un degré encore plus haut, les deux pièces les plus récentes d'O'Neill." ("Lazarus Laughed" and "Strange Interlude")

O'Neill's patented method, as it might be called, by which he flays his subjects as painlessly and artistically as possible, will be discussed later as his special contribution to modern dramatic art.

Details of Technique

*"The contemporary realist has learned to dispense with the outworn theatricalities, the threadbare conventions which discredit the efficient craftsman. ... There is today no abstract or ideal justice to replace the poetic justice of a more artificial theory of art. Action and exposition proceed hand in hand, or become identical; and the modern drama concerns itself less with material action than with a minute and exhaustive consideration of the motives which prompt to action."

Leaving the general consideration of O'Neill's method for a discussion of characteristic details of his work, one finds four devices which he has handled in a new or important way. These are: the use of conventional scene and act divisions; the use of stage directions; the intrusion of the author's personality and the modern viewpoint in writing of history and society; and the use of symbolism. His revival of what Henderson calls the "synthetic" method is worthy of note. Finally, in the use of the monologue, O'Neill has done so much that his treatment is generally considered an innovation rather than an adaptation, the more so that, since Ibsen, the monologue was dead until O'Neill resurrected it.

*4: p.310

Division into Acts and Scenes.

It is rather generally conceded that O'Neill knows what he is about when he constructs a play, no matter how widely he varies from the accepted norm. Walter Pritchard Eaton, conservative though he is, paid O'Neill the following tribute in 1920:*

"It (Beyond the Horizon) has something else, too, which is rare enough in our theatre -- it has form. Form rare in our theatre? you ask in surprise, thinking of all the chatter about technique and all the array of dramas with correct exposition and almost mechanically smooth development. But that isn't form, because it isn't organic. It is construction. Some wise fool has said that plays are not written, they are built. Most of them are, to be sure. But not the fine ones. The fine play is neither written nor built: it is an organic growth from within, and if it observes technical 'laws', that is because the 'laws' happen to have been deduced from previous fine plays, not because the dramatist was bothering much about them. ... The play is resolved as a Mozartian melody is resolved ... Think of the sense of perfect form, of finality of 'The Gods of the Mount' or 'Macbeth'. ... That 'Beyond the Horizon' achieves this rotundity, this self-sufficiency of form, seems to me also apparent.

E. S. Sergeant suggests that this excellence is fairly come by:**

* 6 M a
** 7 p.94

"... Though he scorns stage tricks ... men of the theatre feel that he owes something to the 'sure-fire' technique, which enables him to put even symbolic drama across the footlights as a box-office success -- owes also something of his grasp of pause, of climax, of the capacities of the actor's breath, to his life-long familiarity with 'Monte Cristo'."

Hamilton noted in 1924 both O'Neill's independence of established forms and his evident interest in the creation of a definite form of his own.

*"It is characteristic of Mr. O'Neill's aloofness from the established fashions of the theatre that he does not hesitate to write a play in 2 acts, or a play in 7 or 8 scenes, even though it is too short for a full evening's performance and too long to be used as a curtain-raiser or an after piece. In 'The Hairy Ape' he seemed to be striving for a new dramatic form; but I must confess my inability to estimate the degree of his success, because, in technical intention, I frankly do not know what he was driving at."

This form seems to be evolving into what Cestre termed the "technique du cinema", with its succession of scenes, and its** "tendency to telescope long time periods". But to classify the form as yet is a bit premature, for:

*** "He is still experimenting, and in his experiments O'Neill may discover a form which in its apparent formlessness may be more intensely dramatic than anything the theatre has yet known."

* 5: pp.215,216
** 3 M
*** 4 M

The only deduction that can safely be made at this point is that O'Neill is availing himself of the prerogative of a true dramatic artist in fashioning his materials without more regard for convention than is implied by his knowledge of the necessary limitations of stage-craft.

There is, however, one technical characteristic of plotting that may be deduced from a study of the plays. O'Neill tends to use what Henderson calls the "synthetic" rather than the "analytic" method. That is, the action is begun and completed during the play. In this respect, O'Neill departs from the Ibsen tradition, in which* "the action shown is the culmination of a long series of events". It will be remembered that Ibsen's supreme achievement was the* "identification of the action with the exposition". But this method is wholly foreign to O'Neill's temperament. His use of psychological analysis to show the changes wrought in his characters by successive emotional tempests precludes the possibility of presenting them at the culmination of the experience.

To George Bernard Shaw the public owes the present popularity of the printed play. In the preface to the first volume of "Plays, Pleasant and Unpleasant"** Shaw discusses at length the weakness of drama before Ibsen, pointing out that "the whole difficulty had arisen through the drama of the day being written for the theatre instead of from its own inner necessity". The moment a dramatist tried seriously to write plays that had something to say, Shaw found, he was confronted

* 4 p.73
** Brentano's 1919: p.xi

with the impossibility of giving such a play an authentic representation on the stage. Consequently Shaw decided to have his plays published.

*"He" (the author) "must fall back on his powers of literary expression... So far, this has hardly been seriously attempted by dramatists". But** "...many modern plays, highly successful on the stage, are not merely unreadable, but positively unintelligible without the stage business". "...*** This reform affects not only the reading public but the action itself.

"The case, then, is overwhelming for printing and publishing not only the dialogue of plays, but for a serious effort to convey their full content to the reader. This means the institution of a new art; and I daresay that before these volumes are ten years old, the attempt that it makes in this direction will be left far behind, and that the customary, brief, and unreadable scene specification at the head of an act will by then have expanded into a chapter, or even a series of chapters, each longer than the act itself, and no less interesting and indispensable."

That O'Neill has been influenced by the fashion set by Shaw is evident. He has not followed Shaw's example of writing elaborate prefaces, but he has used stage directions to convey to the reader much that, without these, would be merely implicit in the drama. Indeed, he has even forced the matter somewhat, as we have seen in "The Great God Brown", where the elaborate descriptions of the "real face" of Dion Anthony are

* Brentano's 1919, pp.xxi,xxii
** Ibid, xxiii
*** Ibid, pp.xxiv-v

inserted without justification by his character, as revealed from his deeds, or by the action of the play. Like Barrie, O'Neill writes his stage directions as carefully as the words that he means to have spoken, and in the style of an author, rather than a catalogue-maker. Observe the description of Eben, in "Desire Under the Elms":

"His defiant dark eyes remind one of a wild animal's in captivity. Each day is a cage in which he finds himself trapped but inwardly unsubdued".

Or of Simeon and Peter:

"Their clothes, their faces, their hands, bare arms and throats are earth-stained. They smell of earth."

Though we apparently owe the popularization of the printed play to Shaw's contempt for the actor and his belief in the "impossibility of giving an authentic production of a piece on the stage", nevertheless the new manner of writing plays is actually helpful to the actor. It* "gives him something to build his interpretation on". O'Neill in this respect seems more a dramatist than Shaw, for every line in any of his plays is written as much for the actor as for the reader. That the critics consider this phase of modern drama important is shown by many statements, of which the following is perhaps the most comprehensive:

**"If the movement for a dramatic renascence is to continue, it must proceed through a raised valuation of acting as an art ..."

*4: p.
**3:p.36

An illustration of the type of stage direction which is addressed to the actor as much as to the reader may be taken from "Dynamo":

*"Reuben is sitting in his shirt sleeves on the side of his bed. He is seventeen, tall and thin. His eyes are large, shy and sensitive, of the same gray-blue as his father's. His mouth is like his father's. His jaw is stubborn, his thick hair curly and reddish-blond. He speaks timidly and hesitatingly, as a much younger boy might. His natural voice has an almost feminine gentleness. In intercourse with the world, however, he instinctively imitates his father's tone, booming self-protectively".

Here the actor is given directions for make-up, voice, and interpretation, while at the same time the reader is given what Shaw would call an "authentic" picture of the young man.

In Act II, Reuben is again described at length:**

"Nearly nineteen now, his body has filled out, his skin is tanned and weather-beaten. In contrast to his diffident, timid attitude of before, his manner is now consciously hard-boiled. The look in his face emphasizes the change in him. It is much older than his years, and it is apparent that he has not grown its defensive callousness without a desperate struggle to kill the shrinking boy in him. But it is in his eyes that the greatest change has come. Their soft gray-blue has become chilled and frozen, and yet they burn in their depths with a queer devouring intensity. He is dressed roughly in battered

*Dynamo: p.13
**Ibid: p.89

"shoes, dungaree trousers, faded by many washings, a blue flannel shirt, open at the neck, with a dirty colored handkerchief knotted about his throat, and wears the coat of his old suit. Under his arm he carries six books, bound together with a strap."

Such use of stage directions seems a step in the right direction for O'Neill and modern drama in general.

Treatment of Social and Historical Conditions.

Closely connected with the modern method of giving stage directions is another device popularized by Shaw, -- the device of writing history from the modern standpoint, that is, of treating the characters concerned as types familiar to us all, of writing about them as one would write of a public character of today, and of putting into their mouths modern idioms. O'Neill does this -- perhaps unconsciously -- in "The Fountain" and "Lazarus Laughed", and deliberately in "Marco Millions". Cestre thinks him unsuccessful in the former case, though he rather ironically suggests that this is a matter of opinion. In discussing "Lazarus Laughed", he says:

*"Il nous semble que les autres actes ne se maintennent pas a ce niveau (de la première). Peut-être est-ce notre goût francais de l'unité et de la mesure qui ganchit notre jugement. Mais nous ne nous sentons tout à fait à l'aise en presences des clowneries pueriles ou perverses de Caligula et de l'inconsequence senile de Tibere ou de l'hysterie de Pompeia ... etc. Tout autre peut être l'impression, nous le sentons bien, si

*5 M

"on se place au point de vue des audiences américains, qui aimes les contrastes violentes et les chocs nerveux, et pour qui le passage du sublime à l'ignoble ou du satanique au divin ne laisse pas d'avoir du charme."

"Marco Millions" is perhaps too recent for any published consideration of this particular aspect, or perhaps critics have grown so accustomed to the treatment (remembering "Helen of Troy", "Galahad", and "The Road to Rome") as not to consider it novel enough for discussion. Nevertheless, O'Neill in "Marco Millions" does depict the Polo family as present-day traveling salesmen, neither better nor worse. And, lest any be so dull as not to perceive the allegory, he has added an epilogue.*

"The play is over. The lights come up brilliantly in the theatre. In an aisle seat in the first row a MAN rises, conceals a yawn in his palm, stretches his legs as if they had become cramped by too long an evening, takes his hat from under the seat and starts to go out slowly with the others in the audience. But although there is nothing out of the ordinary in his actions, his appearance excites general comment and surprise, for he is dressed as a Venetian merchant of the later Thirteenth Century. In fact, it is none other than Marco Polo himself, looking a bit sleepy, a trifle puzzled, and not a little irritated as his thoughts, in spite of himself, cling for a passing moment to the play just ended. He appears quite unaware of being unusual and walks in the crowd without self-consciousness, very much as one of them. Arrived in the lobby

* Marco Millions, no page no.

"his face begins to clear of all disturbing memories of what had happened on the stage. The noise, the lights of the streets, recall him at once to himself. Inpatiently he waits for his car, casting a glance here and there at faces in the groups around him, his eyes impersonally speculative, his bearing stolid with the dignity of one who is sure of his place in the world. His car, a luxurious limousine, draws up at the curb. He gets in briskly, the door is slammed, the car edges away into the traffic and Marco Polo, with a satisfied sigh at the sheer comfort of it all, resumes his life."

O'Neill uses too the Shavian device of making direct ironical comments on present day society, ex cathedra, when he sees a chance. In "The Emperor Jones", after giving us the list of characters, he goes on to say:* "The action of the play takes place on an island in the West Indies as yet not self-determined by white Marines". In "The Fountain" his description of the three nobles, Oviedo, Castillo and Mendoza is similarly motivated:** "They are the type of adventurous cavaliers of the day -- cruel, courageous to recklessness, practically uneducated -- knights of the true Cross, ignorant of and despising every first principle of real Christianity -- yet carrying the whole off with a picturesque air."

Whether one admires this device -- the writer does not -- it demands consideration, for it is undoubtedly a signpost that marks one of the trends of modern drama,-- the tendency to use drama as an exposition of the author's ideas. The trouble with

*"The Emperor Jones: page not numbered
** The Fountain: p. 110

it is that it is out of key in such illustrations as those quoted. In "Marco Millions", on the other hand, the whole play is satire. Hence the epilogue forms a satisfactory cadence.

Symbolism.

A vehicle for conveying his own ideas and theories which is a far greater favorite with O'Neill is symbolism. Following Ibsen, he uses symbolism in the modern style, which has two characteristics. It is vague and far-reaching, and it rather fogs the realistic presentment of the incidents of the play. An excellent example of this in the Ibsen theatre is "The Wild Duck", where the wild duck is loosely identified with each and every member of the Ekdal family. Almost everything in the play may be termed symbolic,-- Werle's shortsightedness, Gregers' inability to light his own stove, the garret that suggests the "depths of the sea". That even so masterly a craftsman as Ibsen was not always completely successful in the use of symbolism is suggested by the conversation in Act III between Hedwig and Gregers, in which the description of the attic, with the old bureau, the clock that "isn't going now",* and the long speech about the English books, are all irrelevant to the plot, and not especially significant even to the student who realizes that they are meant as symbols, though he cannot tell of what.

* Plays: Hendrick Ibsen, Macmillan 1927, p. 144

Perhaps the best example of this vague, modern symbolism in O'Neill's plays is found in "The Great God Brown" in three speeches. The first is made by Billy Brown's mother in the prologue.*

"The nights are so much colder than they used to be! Think of it, I once went moonlight bathing in June when I was a girl--but the moonlight was so warm and beautiful in those days, do you remember, Father?"

A few minutes later Dion's father and mother appear. The mother says:**

"It's cold. June didn't use to be cold. I remember the June when I was carrying you, Dion--three months before you were born. ... The moonlight was warm, then, I could feel the night wrapped around me like a gray velvet gown lined with warm sky and trimmed with silver leaves!"

In the epilogue, Margaret (Dion's wife) is seen on *** "the same spot on the same dock as in Prologue on another June night". She says to her sons:

"But the nights now are so much colder than they used to be. Think of it, I went in moonlight-bathing in June when I was a girl. It was so warm and beautiful in those days. I remember the Junes when I was carrying you boys..."

Probably O'Neill himself does not quite know what this is all about. But it is very suggestive, and poetical,-- hence symbolic in the best modern sense.

Now ancient and mediaeval symbolism was clean-cut, as

*The Great God Brown: p.13
**Ibid: p.16
***Ibid: p.97

indeed all primitive symbolism is likely to be. The cross had obvious meanings: so had the sacred fish. A snake with its tail in its mouth still symbolizes clearly the occult to a Hindu mystic. A skull and cross-bones make a symbol that a child's mind can fathom. So do money-bags.

That O'Neill inclines as much to ancient as to modern symbolism is clear from his use of masks in "Lazarus Laughed" and "The Great God Brown".

In "Lazarus Laughed", each chorus has masks representing the racial type -- semitic or Roman or Greek -- and the individual type -- Simple, Ignorant, Happy, Eager, Self-Tortured, Instrospective,* and so on, varying according to the period of life each has attained. Here the symbolism is worked out like a problem in mathematics, or as in a mediaeval morality play.

That O'Neill uses both kinds of symbolism, and that he is using them more and more -- indeed, Shepley points out that** "the movement toward symbolism ... is noticeable even in O'Neill's stage directions" -- is significant to the student of modern drama. For a purpose evidently moves the playwright to the increasing use of this method. What is it?

To answer this question requires further analysis. What is symbolism, anyway, and why does any one use it?

Symbolism is a form of allegory -- which is a form of metaphor. It consists in clothing an abstract idea with concrete form. For example, a motorist sees a sign representing an arrow

*Lazarus Laughed: pp. 11,53,etc.
** 2: p.13

with the head pointing his way. The symbol tells him that traffic on that street is supposed to go in the opposite direction to that he is pursuing. Such symbolism is simple. O'Neill represents Dion Anthony wearing a mask.* "The mask is a fixed forcing of his own face--into the expression of a mocking, restless, defiant, gayly scoffing and sensual young Pan". This symbolism is simple, too. It suggests that people who are too sensitive and shrinking to get along with other people have to conceal their real feelings by assuming a false expression.

Why should an author use symbolism? For several reasons. The most laudable is because it is easy for the audience to understand. Indeed, such a motive lies at the base of all early symbolism, which resolves itself into an attempt to give primitive minds something to grasp and cling to in their struggles upward to the comprehension of ideas, and is, of course, why early symbolism is, as aforesaid, "clean-cut". Any author who uses metaphor should have such a purpose,-- the clarification and simplification of an abstract thought by concrete illustration.

The second reason for using symbolism is, like modern symbolism itself, more vague and far-reaching. It is born when the craftsman suddenly decides he is not interested in his work, as such, but in what lies behind his work. He is painting a sunrise, perhaps, when he discovers that what he wants to paint is an idea -- why the sun rises. Or perhaps where the sun comes from. Or its beneficent effects. Or where it is going. Yearn-

*The Great God Brown: p.14

ing, shaken by his inchoate thoughts, he endeavors to depict with his pigment not only the phenomenon but the ideas. If he is enough of an individualist, he even tries to put into the colors the answers to the questions. The result is likely to be a muddle. No David has yet slain Goliath by attempting to kill two giants with one stone,-- to say nothing of three.

But that O'Neill is unsuccessful in his use of this kind of symbolism is less important than that he is using it so much. For it is another symptom of a disease we have already discussed, a disease arising from an abuse of romanticism -- a disease that might be characterized as the schizophremia* of drama, in which the playwright splits apart the world as it is from the world as he imagines it, and lives in the realm of fancy, untroubled by realities that might confute his imaginings. But we have seen that modern drama has no place for these phantasies, demanding instead constructive criticism of real life.**

*** "The true dramatic realist does not create a drama for the mere object of expounding a given thesis. ... But he accepts a problem, a generalization on life, a sociological datum, as the basis ... for his structure ... The thesis-drama is a mistaken form. ... Art can never demonstrate anything". The dramatist merely tries "to awaken thought through emotion". He realizes the moral quality of human experience, and uses it. But to do this he must "select certain characters placed in certain situations which implicitly carry their own meaning."

* more commonly called dementia præcox
** p. 2
*** 4: pp.94,95,96

In brief, then, O'Neill's forcing of symbolism is bad art. But it represents a trend in modern drama that the critic may deplore but not ignore.

O'Neill's Innovation

From a thoughtful reading of his plays, the student has learned that O'Neill has a purpose and an interest. The purpose is to preach his gospel of naturalism and determinism. The interest is in human beings. From the purpose, as this thesis has tried to show, comes the weakness of his drama,--the fitting of his characters to a Procrustean bed. But unlike Procrustes, who spared no one, O'Neill takesoccasional holidays, when the bed of torture is quite forgotten, and the author entertains the guests of his brain with the consideration of a true host. That is, he allows them to be themselves. When this happens, O'Neill writes plays that are unique in their masterly depiction of people.

The method of depiction is one that O'Neill has rescued from the scrap-heap and worked over into something brand-new and powerful. It was Ibsen who cast monologue, or soliloquy into the dustbin. There is stayed until Strindberg picked it up to use in a single play to produce a definite effect. That play, "The Stranger" influenced O'Neill, when he wrote "The Emperor Jones", which, as we have seen, is practically a monologue for six scenes.

And the old machinery worked. It put the play over, as it had put over plays from the days of Aeschylus, and O'Neill

promptly included it among his permanent tools. The critic, studying the device, has a reason to offer. This is not really the soliloquy discarded by Ibsen, but its twin. There are two kinds of soliloquies, the reflective and the constructive. The constructive soliloquy is a poor device. In it the actor tells the audience the facts about the plot which the author wishes them to know. Such a method is inartistic, because it seems unnatural, Ibsen found he could tell these facts naturally and yet effectively in conversation, and for that reason he discarded the other method.

But the psychologist knows that there are some things which most people do not tell in conversation. They do not repeat to any hearer their secret hopes, or fears, or sins, or aspirations. The novelist, when he wants us to know these inmost thoughts of his characters, employs the convention by which he enters into their minds and reports their thinking. The dramatist, from time immemorial, has used another device,--the reflective soliloquy. By means of this the character speaks aloud his secret thoughts, as Brutus Jones does in the play mentioned above.

Now an essential part of the convention of the reflective soliloquy is that no one on the stage shall overhear it. For it is not really speech. It is thinking made intelligible to the audience. But the older playwrights generally helped out the convention by having the character alone on the stage when he indulged in a reflective soliloquy, as Hamlet is when he speaks the famous "To be or not to be".

But O'Neill does not. He is working the reflective soliloquy for all it is worth, and one must admit that it is worth a good deal to him. Beginning tentatively with "The Great God Brown", he began to use the reflective soliloquy as a device to tell the audience the secret thoughts of one character, while another character stood by, unheeding, unhearing.* In this case, the device was helped by the masks, which were removed when the speaker indulged in solioquy, and (presumably) used as a shield between the other character and the speaker. But in "Strange Interlude", O'Neill has no such help. The characters speak to one another, and think aloud, quite promiscuously. In the book, the thoughts are done in small type. On the stage, the actors stiffen and look "off" when they are thinking.

It is rather intriguing to note that the twentieth century public, supposed to pique itself on freedom and on realism, is perfectly docile in its acceptance of a convention so unnatural! Doubtless the wide-spread interest in psychological analysis is a large contributory factor. The greatest study of mankind today is certainly man. In the desire to make that study fruitful, mankind cheerfully accepts the rules of any game that promises results.

O'Neill's game promises results, and makes its promise good. By means of it one arrives at an intimate knowledge

* He had used it sporadically in other plays: "Welded" and "Desire Under the Elms" especially, but for only a few lines, and more in the guise of an "apart".

of the individuals in his plays unparalled in drama. Their meannesses, their faults, their doubts, their conceits and their vanities, he bares before the spectator. He knows them as he has perhaps never known a human being before, by their words, by their acts, and by all the welter of thoughts that lie below.

The drama in this device is produced from the conflict, which every one admits, between the acts people perform, the words they say, and the acts they would like to perform, the words they would like to say. MacGowan works this out in detail:

*"This device"(of "Strange Interlude") "was more than soliloquy, and it did more than expose the thoughts of people. It was a living and exciting dialogue of a new kind. To the dramatic contrasts and conflicts of ordinary spoken dialogue O'Neill added the contrasts and conflicts of thought. There was the speech of Nina against the speech of Charlie, the thought of Nina against the speech of Charlie, the thought of Nina against the thought of Charlie, and sometimes the speech of one against the thought of the other.

"It is this new dramatic contrast that sets off O'Neill's method from the free soliloquy and asides of the older romantic stage."

Cestre thinks that the device goes deeper than dialogue,-- is an integral part of the play as well as of the character depiction:

*7 M 6

*"Puisque ses heros sont divisées contre eux-memes et qu'a tout moment le subconscient chez eux éleve son murmure contre les timidités ou les docilités de la conscience, et puisque ce debat est la veritable source du drame, qui est d'abord intérieur avant d'entrainer par répercussion des péripéties ou des catastrophes, il importe que cette voix terrace, moins sonore, mais, de fait, plus forte que l'autre, se fasse entendre."

In the chorus of favorable comment there is but one dissenting voice. Shipley observes of "Strange Interlude":

**"In the asides, each character must psychoanalyze itself, or present no more than such thoughts as are commonly withheld from speech: these -- in life and in good drama -- are readily inferred from situation, betraying word, and action. O'Neill, selecting the second alternative, gives us little we could not have gathered without his added words; the father's desire to hold his daughter near, her son's hatred of the intruder in the house: what need of their asides to tell us these?"

The point is worth consideration. It sends one to the play itself. In the opening scene Charlie Marsden, a novelist of some repute, waiting for Nina and her father, thinks aloud. The idle phrases of his "drifting thoughts" are quite evidently the phrases of a writer, but they are intensely personal, and go quickly to a revolting sex-experience which after many years, still obsesses the man. He goes all over it in his thoughts, ending, "Why does my mind always have to dwell on that?"

*5 M: p.137
**2: p.27

This is something Charlie would never mention aloud to any one. Yet it has colored his whole life, his whole outlook. He refers to it three times again in the course of the play,* and each time the reference is a revelation of the man's real attitude toward sex. The attitude is, on the surface, detached and cool,-- the attitude of a man who is affectionate, not emotional, tender but not passionate. But the soliloquies referred to have prepared the onlooker to guess that this apparent detachment and indifference are but the outward sign of Charlie's inward disgust with all emotions that arise from sexual desire. Based on a single incident, his feelings on the subject are morbid and pathological. Every real emtion he feels toward Nina is colored by this fierce disgust. So he controls his acts, plays the mother and father to her, the uncle to her son, quite charmingly, until at last the whole matter of sex ceases to torment him,-- much--.

This brief analysis of what O'Neill has done with Charlie might be duplicated as regards every character in the play, even the child Gordon. It convinces the student that MacGowan was right when he said of "The O'Neill Soliloquy":**

"Consider the purpose of the spoken thought and you will see how this has to be O'Neill's chief contribution to the art of playwrighting: for it matches the chief purpose of O'Neill's art. This purpose is to get behind the surface of things. Realism has never contented him. ... He knew things about men

* Strange Interlude: pp. 48; 174; 204
** 7 M c

"and women that would come out only haltingly through the medium of pure realism. To drag these things out of their souls and put them freely and clearly on the stage has been the obsessing problem of O'Neill's work as an artist."

Before leaving the whole topic of the O'Neill soliloquy one must in duty bound point out that O'Neill overworks it. Clark believes that in "Strange Interlude"* "perhaps one-third of all the words not intended to be heard by the other characters might have been omitted without the loss of anything essential". Any reader of the play would agree with this.

Moreover, O'Neill occasionally blunders into using the constructive soliloquy when he means to use the reflective. An example is at hand from "Dynamo".** In Act II, Mrs. Life leans out of her window, thinking: "The sun is hot ... I feel so dozy ... I know why dogs love to lie in the sun ... and cats and chickens... they forget to think they're living ... they're just alive... alive... poor Mrs. Light is dead...".

As one reads along, instinctively here comes annoyance. If O'Neill wants to tell his readers about Mrs. Light's death, he could do it better than this.

But occasional overuse of a tool is no adverse criticism on the tool. And to use the wrong one is a venal error. By and large, O'Neill deserves the commendation his new technique has won him.

*6: p.179
** Dynamo: p.83

Diction

No essay on modern drama as presented in O'Neill's plays would be complete without some comment on the diction. There are obvious things to say. O'Neill's plays are couched in the language people really use to talk, as far as he can tell what it is. It is deliberately ordinary. But to prove this by quotations is impossible. It is a matter of pitch,--of key. One must read a whole play straight through to find it. One ordinary quotation does not make a proof, nor do one hundred. But as a musician does, a trained reader can feel the "key" in which an author chooses to write. O'Neill's is "Key of C".

Of course the result is not quite ordinary.* "He writes with a curious kind of eloquence. He gives you the impression that he is faithfully repeating the speech of actual people that he has observed; yet there is an emotional pulsation in his style that is not present in the daily speech of the denizens of water-front saloons."

The second obvious comment on O'Neill's diction is that he is fond of profane language, of coarse language, and of the kind of words that respectable middle-class people are not expected to use. Hamilton has an interesting explanation of this:

*5: p.216

*"Most of the swearing in the world", he says, "is done from an obscure desire to revel in the sound of words." O'Neill's sense of literary style ... accounts for his fondness for obscene language and profane ejaculations." Whatever the reason, the critic is bound to note the fact.

Turning to another aspect of the matter, Hamilton grants O'Neill to be**"gifted with an excellent ear for rhythm. He has learned its effect on the emotions of the listener." But he thinks him lacking in felicity of expression.

Shipley concurs.***"Rarely does he find the words, does he attain the poetic diction, to achieve the simple sublimity of elemental growth and pain."

As for Barrett Clark, he thinks that the dramatist is showing a growing tendency to write "fine" speeches and work in purple patches.**** "'The Fountain' had many of them, and 'The Great God Brown' a few. I am not here referring to the dialogue in general, but to the rhetorical effusions of Ponce de Leon and Kublai and Dion. I can't rid myself of the impression that O'Neill is striving for his effects. His gift for poetry lies not in written speeches, but in his conceptions, in scenes and situations, and occasionally in separate lines that illuminate not only by their intrinsic verbal values, but by their implications."

To write on the topic of diction anyway is but to express a personal opinion. Personally, the writer agrees with

*5: p.217
** Ibid: p.216
***2: p.28
****6: pp. 170, 171

Hamilton and Shirley and Clark, but would go further, and suggest that O'Neill is a dramatist in spite of his diction.

Nevertheless, he has written one sentence that possesses true felicity of expression. It has the haunting quality of a phrase from a Chopin melody. Lazarus says to Tiberino, who is trying to get him to explain his secret for growing younger instead of older: "I know that age and time are but timidities of thought."

Summary

O'Neill's theatre is significant in showing the trend of modern drama, not only because he is recognized as an important playwright, but because it coincides with the general characteristics of modern drama as analyzed by Archibald Henderson and Thomas Dickinson.* His plays form "a drama of immediate actuality". Henderson has reminded us that Ibsen, about whom he coined the above phrase, was the creator of this type.** "His fundamental data were two: people of today; time the present." We have seen how strictly O'Neill adheres to this. Even in the legendary plays he is writing about people of today, using the legends merely as an allegory for the better setting forth of his ideas about modern people and present day society. So much so, that the time is almost blatantly "the present"-- though the stage is set with period furniture.

In writing about people of today, moreover, O'Neill has shown his interest to lie not with problems of conduct which are selfishly individual or accidental, but with those which arise spontaneously from modern social organization and eternal human desires, weaknesses, and aspirations. So we have the plays which deal with marriage, and the plays which

*pp. 2 and 3 of this thesis
**4: p.86

show the adjustments and maladjustments of people with society. And we have the character plays, dealing with such lasting themes as man's desire for immortality, the meaning of life, woman's passionate need for love.

We have seen, too, that O'Neill's treatment of these themes has a tendency to take the form of a statement of his own ideas. But that where he has done this, the play has been less successful than when he merely attempts to depict a cross-section of life that is significant in itself. He has made his reputation with the latter type: "Beyond the Horizon", "Anna Christie", "Desire Under the Elms", "Strange Interlude". We believe that this is a good sign, that it indicates a healthy frame of mind on the part of the public, showing that they prefer their favorite food raw, to having it flavored with alien ingredients,-- no matter how skillful the cook.

The single exception proves to have been "The Great God Brown", where the public seems to have gobbled the dish under a misapprehension, so cleverly has O'Neill disguised the real substance from all but a few discerning critics. And since most of these are epicures, they have transferred their admiration, ignored the stuff, and acclaimed the consummate skill of the chef.

In other respects than this matter of perhaps too-romantic treatment, O'Neill's methods deserve all the credit they have received. He has shown hirself a true dramatic artist in his plays. First, because he is an excellent technician, trained in the use of such tools as adapting his speeches

to the actor's voice, calculating the emotional effect of rhythm on the audience, or the manipulation of settings, the stage tricks of the soliloquy, the aside and apart. Secondly, because he is more than technician, in that he uses every tool solely as an economical means to bring about the attainment of his idea,-- the authentic presentment of his theme. Never does he stoop to a theatrical effect for its own end. And if O'Neill is representative, then this characteristic is significant. For it means that drama is taking itself seriously, as an art, not as a money-making device.

Finally, we have seen that O'Neill's surpassing interest is in character. Character analysis is the motif of all his theatre. A new method of character analysis is his great innovation for dramatic art. These characters of his, moreover, are ordinary people, whose interest for the audience lies in that fact, since they are representative of common human traits. True, O'Neill sometimes fails in his portraiture: in endeavoring to make his characters more typical than reality itself, he leaves them unconvincing. But what concerns the student is not that O'Neill occasionally gets off the path, but the direction of that path. This we have seen.

"If I wire to venture a prophecy", said Henderson,* "I should predict that the drama of the 20th century will exhibit two main streams of tendency. The one will present woman's struggle to effect sane adjustments within her new and progressively enlarging freedom; the other will present man's struggle

*4 p.273

"to realize his potentiality and limitation in the light of the newer social communism."

Modern drama, as bodied forth in O'Neill's plays, has realized the prophecy.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

To facilitate reference. each book or article quoted in the thesis is numbered, and this number is given in the footnote below the quotation. (Except in the case of O'Neill's own plays, where the title is given in full)

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The writer desires to express indebtedness for the background of this study to the lectures of Professor Joseph Taylor. of C. L. A.. and of Dr. Austin Warren, of P. A. L. To the first ~~is~~ due the technical terms here used are as well as the general background. To the latter is owed the knowledge of modern philosophy, especially of the new humanism, which has helped in clarifying the whole paper.

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As must be evident from the small size of the bibliography, every article and book in the list has been used to the fullest extent.

The writer has endeavored by copious quotation to give full credit to the originator for any opinions here set forth. But in the analysis of O'Neill's philosophy, which is original, she has used the plays themselves.

Bibliography

Plays by Eugene Gladstone O'Neill

Title	Publisher	Edition Used	Date of Publication
Anna Christie	Boni & Liveright	The edition used in all cases was "The Works of Eugene O'Neill", in uniform binding. The volumes used are identifiable by the date of publication.	1925
All God's Chillun Got Wings	"		1925
Before Breakfast	"		1925
Beyond the Horizon	"		1925
Desire Under the Elms	"		1927
Diff'rent	"		1925
Dreamy Kid, The	"		1925
Dynamo	"		1929
Emperor Jones, The	"		1925
First Man, The	"		1925
Fountain, The	"		1926
Gold	"		1925
Great God Brown, The	"		1926
Hairy Ape, The	"		1927
Lazarus Laughed	"		1927
Marco Millions	"		1927
Moon of the Carribbees and six plays of the sea	"		1926
Strange Interlude	"		1928
Straw, The	"		1925
Welded	"		1927

Bibliography of Reference Books

Ref. No.	Title	Author	Publisher	Place	Date
1.	American Playwrights of Today	Burns Mantle	Dodd Mead & Co.	N.Y.	1929
2.	Art of Eugene O'Neill, The	Joseph To.Shipley	Univ.of Washington Book Store	Seattle	1928
3.	Case of American Drama, The	Thomas H.Dickinson	Houghton Mifflin (The Riverside Press)	N.Y.	1915
4.	Changing Drama, The: Contributions and Tendencies	Archibald Henderson	Henry Holt & Co.	N.Y.	1914
5.	Conversations on Contemporary Drama	Clayton Hamilton	Macmillan Co.	N.Y.	1924
6.	Eugene O'Neill: The Man and His Plays	Barrett Clark	Robert M. McBride & Co.	N.Y.	1929
7.	Fire Under the Andes (Eugene O'Neill, the Man with a Mask)	Elizabeth Shepley	Alfred A.Knopf (214 pages)	N.Y.	1927
8.	Spokesmen, Modern Writers and American Life (Eugene O'Neill)	T. K. Whipple	D.Appleton & Co.	N.Y. & London	1928
9.	Youngest Drama, The	Ashley Dukes	Ernest Benn Ltd.	London	1923

Bibliography of Magazine Articles

Ref. No.	Name of Magazine	Number	Author	Title
1 M	American Mercury	Aug.1929	G. J. Nathan	The Theatre
2 M	Bookman, The	Aug.1921	Pierre Loring	
3 M	Contemporary Review, The (London)	Mar.1926	Andrew E. Malone	
4 M	Drama, The	Apr.1929	Barrett Clark	
5 M	Revue Anglo-Américaine (Paris)	Oct.1928	C. Cestre (professeur a la Sorbonne)	Eugene O'Neill et Les Surgissements du Tréfond.
6 M a	Theatre Arts Magazine	Oct.1920	Walter Pritchard Eaton	Eugene O'Neill
6 M b	Theatre Arts Magazine	Jan.1925	Robert Garland	Eugene O'Neill and This Big Business of Broadway
7 M a	Theatre Guild Magazine	Nov.1928		
7 M b	Theatre Guild Magazine	Jan.1929		
7 M c	Theatre Guild Magazine	Feb.1929	Kenneth MacGowan	The O'Neill Soliloquy

Newspapers

Boston Newspapers of September and October 1929, especially

1 N The Boston Herald: Tuesday, Oct. 8, 1929

2 N The Boston Post: Sunday, Sept. 29, 1929

3 N The Boston Transcript: Sept. 30, 1921: Letters to the Editor

Appendix i

Quotations (arranged chronologically) regarding the status of O'Neill as playwright.

1921. Pierre Loring in The Bookman: "He has been pronounced the finest American dramatist writing today." (2 M)

1924. Clayton Hamilton in Conversations on Contemporary Drama (chapter on O'Neill, p. 200): "His rapid rise to fame is all the more remarkable because it has been achieved on critical grounds alone, without the impetus of any unusual success at the box-office." (5)

1925. Robert Garland in Theatre Arts Magazine (p.3): "Eugene O'Neill is the first American playwright, if only by the process of elimination." (6 M b)

1927. E. S. Sergeant in "Fire Under the Andes" (p. 84): "In spite of that high reputation which he is quite Irish enough to enjoy, in his secret heart-- 'the foremost American playwright', 'the foremost writer of plays in English'-- there is nothing crystallized about him". Again (p. 95): "Since then (1918) Eugene O'Neill has come into a position of undisputed leadership in the American theatre -- a position reinforced by the translation of his works into many foreign languages and their production in European countries, and even in the Orient." (7)

Appendix i (cont.)

1928: Andrew E. Malone in The Contemporary Review: "He has been hailed by no less a critic than Mr. St. John Ervine as 'immeasurably the most interesting man of letters that America has produced since the death of Walt Whitman." (3 M)

Appendix ii

The Philosophy of Lazarus

p. 71. "Life is for each man a solitary cell whose walls are mirrors ... I tell you to laugh in the mirror, that seeing your life gay, you may begin to live as a guest and not as a condemned one!"

p. 72. "Men must learn to live. Before their fear invented death they knew, but now they have forgotten. They must be taught to laugh again."

p. 73. "Out with you! Out into the woods! Upon the Hills! Cities are prisons where man locks himself from life. Out with you under the sky! ... Let laughter by your new clean lust and sanity! Cry in your pride, 'I am laughter, etc.'"

p.106. "There is God's laughter on the hills of space, and the happiness of children, and the soft healing of innumerable dawns and evenings, and the blessings of peace."

p.128 " Do you fear peace?"

p.138. "Man's loneliness is but his fear of life."

p.146. "There is hope for Man. Love is Man's hope--love for his life on earch, a noble love above suspicion and distrust."

p.159. "Let your heart climb on laughter to a star."

Cestre gives this interpretation of the faith of Lazarus (la foi de Lazare):* "L'homme sera immortel s'il veut triompher de la mort, s'il sait que les molécules de son corps et de son âme sont la poussière vivante de l'Etre universel, s'il se persuade de cette vérité, que les hommes peuvent disparaître, mais que l'Homme survit et marche sans cesse vers un plus haute destinée."

To all of this the practical writer of this thesis can only say -- I don't see any cause here for even the most celestial laughter.

*5 M p.134

Appendix iii

Religion of the Reverend Hutchins Light

God is personal:* "But, Lord, Thou knowest what a thorn in the flesh that atheist, Life, has been since the devil brought him next door ... How long, O Lord? does not his foul ranting begin to try Thy patience?"

God's will is manifest in His priest:** "He shall follow in my footsteps--mine and those of my father before me and his father before him. It is God's manifest will."

God demands denial of the flesh: "She has always desired the comfortable path ... where the spirit decays in the sinful sloth of the flesh" And again: "Who am I to cast the first stone at Reuben if he desires a woman?... hasn't my love for Amelia been one long desire of the senses?.."

God demands that His priests shall not resist evil: "I had to slink by and pretend not to hear! ... If it weren't for my cloth I'd have beaten his face to a bloody pulp! I'd ... A murderer's thoughts ... Lord God, forgive me!"

*Dynamo: p.13-14
*Ibid